**Article**

# Hollows of Experience

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Illustration: Klossowski's (1969) labyrinth

"If being is to unveil itself,
it will be in the face of a transcendence and not an intentionality;
it will be brute being caught in the shifting sands,
a being that reverts to itself:
it will be the *sensible* hollowing itself out."

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 1968, p. 210

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## TABLE of CONTENTS

## Abstract

This essay is divided into two parts, deeply intermingled. Part I examines not only the origin of conscious experience but also how it is possible to ask of our own consciousness how it came to be. Part II examines the origin of experience itself, which soon reveals itself as the ontological question of Being. The chief premise of Part I chapter is that symbolic communion and the categorizations of language have enabled human organisms to distinguish between themselves as actually existing entities and their own immediate experience of themselves and their world. This enables them to reflect upon abstract concepts, including "self," "experience," and "world." Symbolic communication and conceptualization grow out of *identification*, the act of first observing conscious experiencing and intimating what it is like, *mimesis*, a gestural protolanguage learned through imitation, and *reflection*, seeing oneself through the eyes of others. The step into actual intentional speech is made through *self-assertion*, *narrative*, and *intersubjectivity*. These three become the spiral of human cultural development that includes not only the adaptive satisfaction of our biological needs, but also the creativity of thought. With the mental-conceptual separation of subject and object – of self and world – the human ability to witness the universe (and each other) is the ground of our genuinely human quality. Consciousness gives human life its distinctively human reality. It is, therefore, one and the same ability that enables us to shape planet Earth by means of conceptual representations (rather than by means of our hands alone) while also awakening us to the significance of being.

Looking beyond human self-consciousness to investigate the origin and nature of awareness itself in Part 2, reductive objective materialism is found to be of little use. Direct experience also falls short in that, in order to be transformed into objective knowledge about itself, it must always be interpreted through and limited by the symbolic contexts of culture and the idiosyncratic conceptualizations of the individual. Awareness in itself must thus be considered ultimately unexplainable, but this may more indicate its inexpressible transcendence of all symbolic qualifiers than its nonexistence. It is suggested that awareness is not "self-aware" (as in deity) but is instead unknowing yet identical with the only true universal: the impetus of creative unfolding. Our human knowledge, as an expression of this unfolding, is seen to emerge from our conscious experiencing and, in turn, to have the power – and enormous responsibility – of directing that experience. Our underlying symbolic worldviews are found to be autopoietic: They limit or open our conscious experience, which, in turn, confirms those worldview expectations. As we explore a future of unforeseeable technological breakthroughs on an ailing planet who patiently copes with our "success," truly *vital* decisions about the nature, meaning, and future of conscious experience will have to be made.

## PART I: Being and the Question of Its Conscious Quality

### §1. Representation and Categorization

*What if all this theory's the equivalent of nightmare, its menace*
*masquerading as philosophy?*
*... wouldn't anything I'd come up with have to be a monstrous mix of*
*substance and intention?*
(C. K. Williams, "The Method," 1992, pp. 63-4)

It is a curious thing to speak of *consciousness*, much less to enter a field commonly called *consciousness studies*. *Stud*y requires a separation from the object to be studied. It is curious enough to study the world with which we should be united through sensory links and telluric instincts, but, even more dubious, how can consciousness be separated from the conscious mind studying it? This methodological separation is expected to ensure impartiality, because only objects can be subjected in principle to validation by others. This applies even if the object is one's own subjectivity: Introspective analysis requires a conceiver to *conceive* him- or herself. In this case, the object of investigation is identical with the investigator. Surely the fantasy of unbiased objectivity becomes at this point impossibly strained. Surely both the "object" and "subject" of such an undertaking are altered through their mutual implication. Thus the postmodern poet C. K. Williams above questions this paradox in his collection, *A Dream of Mind* (1992).

Since theorizing about consciousness from the position of consciousness puts us in a unique position — one in which conscious experience is continually being created even while the object being studied transforms — the use of poetic expression seems to me well justified. To study this particular object is to change the way we think about *it*, and since both subject and object are aspects of consciousness, we become caught up in the polarities of a single circle or, better, a spiral. To study consciousness is to already engage in *poiesis*, a making or creating.

What is the "substance" of the conscious mind to which Williams refers if not the fundamental reality of consciousness, of being, itself? Consciousness in itself is not the "content of consciousness," even if one's own experience be that content. It is even questionable whether or not the "substance of mind" is a substance or if it might in some ineffable manner be, in itself, a dynamic process that yet supports such seemingly substantial content. But process or substance, it remains curious how such a subjective invisibility can yet observe itself as an object of study. It is just as curious to consider what sort of *intention* would drive one to do so. Despite philosophical hairsplitting on this term, it seems likely that the intentions of any organism can never veer too far from its innate evolved instincts for survival, predominance, and reproduction. The intention involved in dividing the mind from the world in the first place may be more understandable. In this way, we became masters of our territories, emerged as the predominant large animal on the planet, made nearly all environments habitable, and destabilized our planet. It is worth considering how this human intention to *know* — built upon instincts to predominate, grow, and complexify — might be infecting the primal "substance" which gave rise to it.

In all our endeavors, even those undertaken to obtain objective knowledge, we most often continue to be driven by those primal instincts of "survival and reproduction," that is, of environmental control. So when raw experience or generalized awareness becomes conscious experience, i.e., *self-consciousness*, and looks "back" upon its source to study and understand it, it continues to be subconsciously motivated by the desire to master and control. This implies that the desire to understand and explain the source of consciousness is in reality the desire to *explain it away* — to sever all ties with its own transpersonal source. It is thus that machine consciousness can be thought possible — it will have no attachment to Nature or instinctive sources and no "unconscious" mind or emotions. With this in mind, I suggest the best way to approach the mystery of the existence of awareness in this universe is to be indirect. We must first understand how we became conscious of such awareness. By first investigating the source of personalized awareness, that is, self-consciousness — an ability seemingly only possessed by humans, with some possible exceptions among higher mammals — we may begin to comprehend the possibilities and limitations of our language-based, conceptualized mode of knowledge-creation.

What has allowed us to conceive of the world “out there” as distinct from our selves or minds “in here”? It must be to do with the power of representation and the subsequent categorization of those representations. It is widely agreed that sensory input at some point in evolution led to representations, though it remains controversial whether these representations be understood as *inner* or, instead, as outer projections — the experienced reality of each creature according to its kind. Should an experienced reality even be termed a representation? Perhaps, but we can never be sure what exactly is being re-presented. Neither can we be certain of the nature of the lived reality of any other organism but our own, though we may conjecture that all organisms experience one. Not all organisms, however, enjoy representations, much less the power to categorize those representations.

All organisms have experience in the sense that a nematode[i], say, can be said to *experience* a change in its environment. Its primitive alimentary structure in fact connects it with its environment so intimately that it is conceivable that the entire ecosystemic itself experiences these changes, these pursuits, these avoidances. At this evolutionary stage, it is unlikely that experiential categorization consists of anything more than the most primitive excitations of eat, hide, or fertilize, and there is no reason to think that there is any centralized processor necessary to decide which. The organism responds throughout itself automatically, as it were. The nematode has no sensory organs as such but like its predecessor, the cell, *prehends*[ii] its environment through its skin and labial protuberances. Lacking explicit sensory distinctions and a central processor, it is very likely the family of nematoda have need of neither representations nor categorizations.

As we climb the so-called evolutionary ladder,[iii] distinct sensory organs do appear: sight, smell, sonar, and what have you. But we have no way of knowing at what stage the senses become capable of being *experienced* separately. Sense organs at this stage may combine in a kind of synaesthetic blur to carry out instinctual stimulus-response

patterns, as Cytowic (1993) has suggested. Since in this case experience likely remains without a central experiencer, it must also remain without sensory distinctions, categorizations, or representations. Yet the response cannot be understood without the stimulus — the evolution of gills or lungs is a response to the presence of oxygen in the environment — so it is difficult to conceive of adaptive experience as only occurring in the isolation of the organism. It may be even more atomized within responding modules of the organism *or* it may be seen more holistically as a dynamic quality of the life of the entire ecosystem of which the individual organism is but a part.[iv]

Likely, more highly evolved nervous systems that feed into brains do have something akin to central processors, if not quite yet a self (even a somatic self). The creatures involved should now be able to focus on distinct senses if it helped them negotiate their environment. If their senses re-present the world such activity is unknown to them: All existence for them is their environment and that environment is as much created by their corporeal apprehensions as by the various energies and molecular combinations of the supra-sensible realm. So whatever categorizations of their experienced world would now be possible would be those drawn from the natural differences of their sensory modalities and, of course, there would be a few other categories possible within the realms of those senses. The physical entity would still note which stimuli are threats, which are prey, which might be mating potential, and which matter not at all. These categorizations continue to be primal response categories without the need for conscious decision-making.

The situation becomes more complex when we begin dealing with mammals that live in tightly-knit, highly competitive social groups. The same primal categories must now be applied to members of one's own species but several subcategories become activated as well. For instance, allies and troublemakers must be recognized and particular rituals observed to keep those alliances oiled and those troublemakers at bay. Yet once we have entered the arena of recognition, we have entered what might be called re-representation and response categorization. Mimicry becomes a possibility and emotional bonds of surprising intensity can be created, at least according to observers of such social animals (e.g., Moussaieff Masson & McCarthy 1995). However, their categorizations remain emotionally based, as well. It is hard to imagine nonsymbolic animals conceptually categorizing objects or themselves or their own experience, though some researchers have attempted to show precisely that. How, after all, could they do so?

With the arrival of speaking hominids, a net was thrown over the world and the entire progress of knowledge within the human species can be seen as a measure of the increasingly fine weave of the strands of that net. With the act of naming, each category can be further reduced to other categories and so on. What we call knowledge is based in increasing conceptual complexification involving both sub-sensory reduction and super-sensory expansion. From infinitesimal superstrings to universe-sized God above, we refine and define every possible category of knowledge and there is no sign of a slowdown on the epistemological horizon.

We have reduced the world to analysis and explanation. We have studied and

explained instinctive behaviour, even a great deal of human behaviour. It seems only natural that we should turn our reductive curiosity upon ourselves and wonder whence this particular awareness that *knows* it is aware and that we alone *seem* to have. Since it is our conscious selves studying our conscious selves, it is indeed curious that few seem to note that this "monstrous mix" must in some reflexive manner change both the way we see ourselves and, just as obviously, the way we feel ourselves *seen*.

By representing the world of experience – perceptually and conceptually – and then categorizing those representations, we reduce the world to objects of knowledge, the natural result of focusing on objects by subjects rather than experiences uniting both. As Jungian psychoanalyst Erich Neumann observed, vital components of direct experience get eliminated in this process of conscious division:

> The conscious mind is a cognitive system whose emphasis on clarity and discrimination tends to sunder the world-continuum into opposites and at the same time to eliminate systematically the emotional component of all that is alive. Thus, the world's aspect of unity and continuity, as well as its liveliness and significance, graspable for instance through feelings and through intuition, must be renounced and is lost in the presence of the ego's restrictedly specialized conscious cognition. These same excluded elements, however, play an emphatic and leading role in extraneous psychic cognition (1989, p. 13).

The "excluded elements" are relegated to the unconscious while these oppositional dichotomies divisively create conscious knowledge.

To examine minds, we must consider the minds of others or each of our own minds as it exists at times different from the present examining. To do otherwise is not only to add a subjective factor to our attempts at impartial examination but to be overwhelmed by present world awareness, rather than concentrating on the cognitive dissociation necessary to do the task at hand. This again requires the abstracting powers of language. So we look at mind and ask questions that will lead us down one roadway instead of another, and that roadway too soon forks in the same way. This is the path of either/or, the construction of a mental realm reduced to but one half of oppositional pairs. Linguist Ferdinand de Saussure noted (1959) that all terms of language are built from these "binary oppositions" that refer essentially to each other. Through the relentless logic of the theorist or the experimentation of the researcher, we march down the fork in the road that we believe will lead us to truth, to knowledge of the real. When the march picks up speed, the quest is invigorating, but do we ever really forget or seal off the road not taken? Can one half of a polarity contain the meaning of the whole?

Yet on we march. We note that our sensations are directly connected to the sense organs of the body. When we hit our thumbs, we hurt. Mind and body are felt to be one. We bury our dead with tokens from this world for their further travels in the next. In the West, Platonism teaches us that the soul is separable from the body and Christendom takes it up. In the East, the main religions agree, adding that our bodies and the very material world they sense are illusions. The door is opened to dualism and idealism. Today, the same questions are asked by seeking individuals and students in Philosophy

of Mind 101 as have always been asked: Does the brain create mind? If not, then does mind create brain? If so, then spirituality or idealism is the path to take, for surely there is an *übermind* behind my own. If we answer that brain does create mind, then we must ask just how it does so and where in the brain mind is located. This is the problem for materialism and the most popular responses have been neural functionalism — that the computational networks of neural connections create a mind — and eliminative materialism — that there is no mind or that it really is *nothing but* neurons and their processes. There are paths which attempt to partake of more than one road at once: Perhaps the brain is not a producer of consciousness but a *transducer* which focuses diffuse mental "energies" into individual experience.

Each road, each choice, leads onward in one direction only until one becomes so comfortable on his theoretic one-way path that he is not concerned at all that the view is obscured on either side. Other possible paths seem to him at best mistaken and at worst stupid and dangerous. A moment's view from an aerial perspective would show us all sorts of hominids enclothed in layers of conceptual certainties striding in all directions at once. What no perspective will reveal is that every traveller, be she pilgrim or conquistador, has made de-cisions and set herself on a path that will directly affect her conscious experience of life. The manner of her seeking or believing or accepting this or that as "reality" will accord with her daily sense of existence. The crawling snake does indeed twist around and bite its own tail.

Like other empirical studies, the "science of consciousness" has proceeded by division. Many have noted that it was not until fairly recently that the existence of a conscious agent with individual subjective intentions was even an acceptable discussion topic in many scientific circles. Cognitive science, among other new disciplines, has found a place for consciousness though it seems much more interested in the contents or effects of consciousness rather than phenomenological consciousness itself. Now that the conscious mind has been admitted to exist, questions may be asked along the lines mentioned above.

Such considerations have never held back the "advance of knowledge" or the "march of progress" in the past few centuries, especially by those who have benefitted the most from a rampant materialism. Those who have raised the study of consciousness into such widespread popularity today see no need now to consider the uroboric twisting involved in being a mind studying mind. Psychology has been at it for a century or more, but it has mostly been focused on behavioural statistics or emotional adjustment. Consciousness Studies, as a nascent discipline, is little more than a decade old and it has found the need to struggle for respectability by proclaiming itself as a science too. Indeed, the big Tucson conferences on consciousness wear the subtitle, "Toward a Science of Consciousness."[V] It seems to be accepted fact that we cannot gain certain knowledge of anything unless we study it empirically and impartially through scientific procedures. This split of the object to be studied from the subject studying it is already an ontological bifurcation.

*If* we accept the brain as the material cause of felt sensation and mind, we must then face the next fork in the road. Does just brain cause consciousness or is the brain merely

the apex of the entire nervous system which thus involves the whole body? Next, does the brain work through its genetic programming to naturally create mind or must it be prodded by circumstances in its environment? The next fork is whether those environmental circumstances, i.e., worldly experience, can change the brain or its synaptic connections. If the brain is as dynamic as the latter question implies (e.g., Damasio 1999; Deacon 1997; Edelman 1987, 1992; Edelman & Tononi, 2000; Ornstein 1991), we next must wonder just how adaptable the brain is, what are the limits allowed through its genetic constraints. And the biggest question of all remains: Just how does any material entity, even one as complex as a mammalian brain, ever create mind, consciousness, or even just experience?

The reader will see that we have gone full circle back to choice one: The fundamental division in approaches to the question of consciousness is whether the brain creates experience or experience the brain. Obviously the sciences lean toward the former, though the neuroscientific proposal of the dynamic brain that changes as a result of experience softens this stance. Experiential practices that accept any sort of transcendence of bodily limitations, such as *psi* or meditation, assume the latter in the sense that the origin of awareness beyond the brain may change neural processing within the brain. Any experience that precedes, exceeds, or transcends the brain is felt to be more real than the brain itself so the brain's reality can only be reactive. This is the question of consciousness and clearly any possible approach to it will be limited by primary contexts such as the medium of communication (in this case language) and the fundamental assumptions about reality with which we naturally begin.

## §2. Conscious Epistemology of Consciousness

> *What might be said of the things in themselves, separated from relationships to our senses, remains for us absolutely unknown.*
> (Immanuel Kant 1787/1996, I.§8.i)

Two elements seem to me necessary for the study of mind to take place: language and time displacement (and the two are not unrelated[vi]). Conceptual demarcation is made possible for us cultural critters through language. Consciously created symbols have made science possible. Conceptual language suggests that we conceive of consciousness as an entity, much as we previously birthed the world as object and the self as subject. The process is communication. When we speak, we act, and when we act, as George Herbert Mead (1963) wrote, we take the position of the other and act back toward ourselves. From the other's point of view, we become an object to ourselves and assume a mind that understands as we understand as the recipient of our communiqué. But it is the naming that demarcates: "Even as Adam in Holy Writ, we name one another. As those who bestow names, we are creating observers even as we participate in the behavior of everyday, and in our naming we, you and I, create our textual world" (Richardson 1989, p. 46).

Simultaneously, it must be considered that the naming which artifactually distinguishes one thing from another does so by creating a distance between the two, but this is not a spatial distance so much as a temporal one, suspending general

awareness in a brief time delay while we focus attention on one explicit object or another through the filter of memory and self-identity. This is to say that our minds are experienced in isolation: as distinct from the material world, from other minds, and from our own bodies through a delay in reaction time. Many Western philosophers (e.g., Nagel 1987), following Descartes, have declared that the one thing of which we can be certain is the experiencing of our sole self. However, the assumption of such fundamental solipsism may be yet another construction of an even more primary intersubjectivity, the illusion produced within the linguistic constraints of a culture that emphasizes individualism. The sense of an inner, isolated, private self has become commonplace for us — though such a private self may in reality be a cultural and autopoietic construction. Not only does language extend the present by devising memoried pasts and anticipated futures, but it holds the immediacy of experience in abeyance until, through words and memory, it can be literally re-cognized and reexperienced after it has been placed within our categories of expectation. Such conscious re-experiencing requires a fraction of a second of time delay, as Libet (1992) and others have shown.

Naming, conceptualizing our own experience, creates a conscious distance from it. It may well have fenced us into a new temporal space to which we have given the term "mind." No longer immersed in unadulterated, living experience, we make experience conscious with the cognitive displacement of mind. When experience becomes conscious, it has itself become an object. No longer one with the environment, we now feel ourselves as distinct from it, opposed to it. In the same way, we become aware of ourselves in the world and self itself is objectified. Experience *simpliciter* does not know; it acts and reacts. Only with the added quality of consciousness does knowing begin. It is conscious experience that knows and it is through conscious experience that the world, or anything else, is known. Of course, since such knowledge is itself consensual, relative, and autopoietic, it may not equal absolute truth.[vii]

And that is the curious thing. For can we know of anything outside of our conscious experience? Experience becomes conscious precisely because it becomes known. New knowledge must be constructed upon the previous foundations of the known so is always limited, narrow, and contingent. Both assuming the reality of the material world or believing in the primacy of the inner self are products of our conscious experiencing, of knowledge creation. In point of fact we do not and cannot know of anything outside of our conscious experiencing.[viii] The act of knowing or even imagining is a conscious act. Of course, we may (consciously) assume or guess that there is a more ultimate reality beyond anything we can consciously experience, but such must remain, by definition, unknown and unknowable.

The master philosopher, Immanuel Kant, made this point almost unassailable in arguments as convincing as they are difficult. But difficult or not, we ignore his conclusions at our peril: "What might be said of the things in themselves, separated from relationships to our senses, remains for us absolutely unknown" (1787/1996, I.§8.i). Yet the "separation from the [subjectivity of the] senses" is precisely the imperative perspective of the sciences. A materialist-reductionist is expected to assume a position of absolute objectivity without any subjective presence because only thus, it is

imagined, can pure reason be untainted by subjective projection. It demands that we observe without the interpolation of an observer, which is, of course, impossible. This is the position clearly and simply defended by Thomas Nagel, especially in his aptly titled collection of essays, *The View from Nowhere* (1986) and elsewhere (1974, 1987). If my mind, or your mind for that matter, is not "out there" beyond itself, how can we pretend to have such a perfectly objective viewpoint? To objectify a mind-independent reality, then to look for mind in that mind-independent reality, is a bizarre sort of logic to say the least.[ix] The fact of the matter is that we cannot observe without being a conscious observer; we cannot be rational without being a mind employing its sense of rationality. As George Zebrowski expressed it in *Omni*: "The dream of reason is to step outside the human skin and see reality plain, free from social and adaptive biological prejudices, to glimpse the 'thingness' of all the 'otherness' outside our minds that is not us. We can talk about it, but have we ever been 'outside', even for a moment?" (June 1994, p. 46)

More recently, Max Velmans (2009) has ably defended the notion that so-called objective reality is in fact our very consciousness – in that our sensory habits, memoried anticipations, and cultural contextualizing create the theatre of our experiences. This is not idealism that says the external world is unreal; it is instead mental realism, which claims the world we experience is in part created by that experience. Gordon Globus (1995) has noted that the brain itself is part of this perceiver-dependent world (but a quantum electrodynamic process in "real reality"). A reality distinct from our own is experienced by a bat, certainly, but also by an indigenous tribal person. The "material" reality we so assiduously study is continually created and changed by our conscious experience of it, in this view, and can never be known independently. A "real reality" of the "things in themselves" beyond all experienced realities is assumed to exist, but there can never be objective access to it.

On the other hand, the materialist would reply that, *obviously*, it is external reality that continually changes our conscious experience, but with the added assertion that consciousness itself is created by – is a product of – the material world and its interactions. It is indeed a "curious thing" to state that the material world has generated the consciousness which first revealed the lineaments of that world, but, curious or not, objective materialism, that is, science, has the track record to make a strong case for its claims. It all begins with the established laws of science, which its adherents claim have validity beyond any conscious awareness of them. In other words, the laws of science are "the things in themselves" or at least a part of them. Furthermore, the application of those laws have led us through an industrial revolution, into the age of technology, and onto the wave of the digital revolution. Who can argue with such material success?

The slag-heap of history is replete with the fallen idols and accepted truths that once germinated from such sources as faith, hope, fear, and, yes, even experience. Once these traditional facts and cosmic verities were exposed to tests of experimental verification, replication, and application, their fundamental unreality became apparent, at least from the perspective of science. The argument usually states that one need only consider the worldviews of preliterate peoples with their gods and demons confabulated to explain weather and sickness or even current testimonies of faith that continue their campaign against naturalistic causation as found in, for example, evolution, natural disaster, and

daily human behaviour. The sun, according to astronomy, is but an ordinary star among zillions. Earth itself is not flat but is instead but a spherical speck in an immeasurable cosmic sea. There is no life force or élan vital; life processes are but particular molecular arrangements influenced by unusual chemical reactions, according to biology. From the scientific explanation of the human body's functions and dysfunctions to the disappearance of the ether, phlogiston, souls, and magic, once dearly held convictions have been ruthlessly uprooted or atavistically clung to as folk beliefs or psychological security blankets. Based in the fundament of objective materialism and economic rapacity, progress of science and technology has been relentless in all spheres of human endeavor: Why should the mind or conscious experience be any less explainable from the same perspective? And is there any reason why that explanation should not find practical application in ever more complex, lifelike technology?

At least this seems to be the justification for the scientific study of consciousness. But the fact remains that the minds that have made such material progress possible have ignored their own existence and complicity. Marching relentlessly down the yellow brick road, they have failed to notice the wizard behind the curtain who has been pulling the strings on the puppet called rationality. Science, attempting absolute objectivity, takes "the view from nowhere." This "nowhere" of absolute objectivity is absolutely beyond subjective experience, by definition, so one is forced to imagine mentally that aforementioned mind-independent reality and imagine oneself within it. To imagine mind in a mindless nowhere is magical thinking indeed. We see that, to begin with, science assumes a worldview, a perspective outside of conscious experience, which is impossible and, finally, a fantasy.

In this way, the study of consciousness attempts to become thoroughly objective: One looks for signs of conscious experience in the material world (almost always the brain) and then attempts to trace it back to its triggers and traces. It is interesting to note that the usual scientific approach does not include looking "back" at one's own consciousness; presumably because this procedure would become tainted with subjective input and affect. For this reason, philosophical phenomenology and psychological introspectionism, not to mention meditation or the expressive practices of the arts, are considered to be of no *use*. The "inner scientists," the actual subjects doing the scientific studies, it must be assumed, exist as nothing but mechanical data recorders.[x] Needless to say, the end result is *scientism*, a shriveled respect for human conscious experience. Since it is no longer seen as primary but as just another unusual phenomenon produced by the forces of evolution in a material world under the rule of natural law, it need not be given the high status we conscious experiencers have traditionally assigned to it.

This refusal to comprehend consciousness as the arbiter of all realities there may ever be – including the imagined "reality" of objective materialism – is necessary for the scientific-technological program to continue its materially successful march. If you cannot observe, get hold of, grasp, count, quantify, measure, or examine a phenomenon – and I mean here the phenomenon itself, not its effects – then such a phenomenon cannot be accepted as real. Thus strict scientific methodology is not going to be able to deal with awareness itself.[xi] The only choices for materialism are to quantify, measure,

and examine the neural correlates and declare them to be the thing in itself, as in eliminative materialism, or to quantify, measure, and examine the qualitative effects and declare them to be the phenomenon itself, as in experimental psychology.

That awareness in itself is a different category of reality from its perceived sources or qualities has often been argued, but most often the argument is simply that mind is not matter, that consciousness is not neurons or synapses or microtubules, as in Chalmers (1996). It needs to be also emphasized that awareness is not the same as the qualities of which one is aware. Awareness itself is not feelings, memories, thoughts, perceptions, or apprehensions. It is what makes these phenomena possible. In Jaynes' (1976) metaphor, awareness is like the light of a flashlight in the dark that reveals objects and qualities but is not the same as those objects and qualities. Furthermore, the light cannot be shone upon itself, so one is left with attempts to try to understand it by studying the objects – the qualities and affects – it illuminates.

So what is awareness in itself? It is odd to realize that whatever answer to that question I attempted here would be equivalent to an attempt to shine a light upon itself. The assumption is, of course, that language can communicate anything without altering it. Perhaps it should be considered that to the extent that consciousness is defined, it is also defining. That is to say, our understandings and assumptions – our cognitive schemata – may reduce or shape nonspecific awareness into individual consciousness as much as do our particular perceptions. In this sense, language not only describes but constructs the object being observed. Awareness observed is reduced to consciousness created, that is, it conforms to its concept. Consciousness then proceeds as an autopoietic manifestation of itself. I will later submit that experience in itself is the result of sensations generated at the point where minute entities like cells or even atomic or subatomic systems interact, but for this birth of sensation in interactive friction to be possible, there must be some sort of awareness-in-itself, a universal background of awareness out of which such primordial experiencing can emerge. This background may be aware but aware *of* nothing, as though in deep, dreamless sleep, a field of infinite potential, waiting, so to speak, for time to begin. How else can we account for raw experiential sensations without falling into infinite regress?

Whether explaining, discovering, or describing such arcane mysteries as the origin of the universe, the nature of time, the emergence of life on Earth, or the enigma of our being here to experience it, it is so easily forgotten that our message is first and foremost found in our medium. Our algebraic notations, our geometric theorems, our words, even our "computer enhanced imagery" are all cultural icons. Energy itself remains a mystery beyond the breakthrough squiggle of $e=mc^2$ and certainly beyond the word "energy." What we know is knowledge, knowledge that in some symbolized form has been made amenable to a thinking consciousness.

There is little doubt about the success of science in explaining the world or the even more obvious success of its offspring technology in creating a new one. The forward plunging prometheans who currently seem to be our cultural avatars no longer take the time to look back nostalgically at a *participation mystique* with nature or even pause to wonder just what it is we are building here or where we are heading. Our intricate

descriptions reach right down into the subatomic non-world of quantum physics and out into cosmic black holes in which the usual laws of physics disappear — forthrightly attempting conceptually to capture timeless and spaceless events. Still, since the observation and conceptualization of phenomena adapt them to fit into the mold of our current consciously experienced reality, it seems a contradiction to hope to explain the nature or origin of awareness itself.[xii] Creating new objects of knowledge makes them part of the objective, material, spatial universe that is understood by science to be fundamental and mind-independent, so discovering and explaining awareness or experience in this way involves an unthinkable paradox. With this in mind, it seems titanic hubris to assume our physics is near to an all-inclusive Theory of Everything[xiii] or that the end of science is nigh since all things are almost explained in their entirety, as John Horgan (1996) has written. Amidst this vast expansion of knowledge into the mathematically measured very small, very large, or very distant, there remains this disquieting apprehension that the essence of awareness, very near indeed, continues to evade our squiggly explanations or our fervour to build and control.

The very language of the possibility of absolute scientific knowledge is rife with cultural assumption and revelatory of the desire for omnipotence as much as omniscience. We cannot even properly think about the world alone without observers. How are we to twist our thinking back to encompass that which makes it possible? Perhaps the experience that undergirts consciousness is unthinkable. I foreshadow my purpose here: What if awareness or experience is as all-pervasive and foundational as universal background radiation? In that case, it makes all experienced phenomena possible (including conscious experience). No matter what strange shapes or sensations these phenomena may take, they are similar if they all arise from a fundamental be-ing or experiencing. It may be that, as Teilhard de Chardin (1959) phrased it, *there is a within to all things*. But no matter how it is phrased, it is wrong in that language is always insufficient and must be so. Being or experience in the material universe is so unexpected that it may be beyond or too pervasive or too slippery to be thought of as just one "phenomenon" among others at all. It may be beyond representation except as, for example, the condition that makes a universe possible.

Awareness itself may be beyond representation but, if so, the scientific study of consciousness must ignore it for science is just this: the quest for adequate representation. It reduces consciousness to a concept among concepts, a phenomenon among phenomena, a representation among representations, so in this way it can be empirically studied as an object from the third person perspective. Science has achieved wonders, but I trust I have shown that its knowledge can never be complete. None of us, as possessors of first-person experience, can ever attain to what Dennett (1991) has called third-person absolutism. Absolute objectivity in a world of subjective experience is an impossibility, as much a fantasy as the megalomania that assumes awareness can be created through appropriate software or that nature can be ultimately mastered by the power of the human mind.

**§3. Non-Conscious Experience**

> *[W]e experience the universe, and we analyze in our consciousness a minute selection of its details.* (Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 1938/1968, p. 121)

Among the many other binary forks in the road toward the *explanation* and *definition* of consciousness is the one in which some loosely identify "consciousness" with "experience" (and often, generously, with "awareness" too despite the fact that this term connotes less specificity and individually-focused attention), and others make a distinction between conscious experience and experience without the added quality of consciousness, i.e., *non-conscious* or *experience*. It seems likely that the way we explain and define conscious experience directly affects the manner in which we consciously experience. It is thus very important that we proceed cautiously when eliding similar definitions into one another.

Those of the higher order thought or perception school of philosophy equate consciousness with self-consciousness since our human type of consciousness, i.e., self-consciousness, is all we know first-hand of consciousness of any kind. Tor Nørretranders agrees, adding the qualities of self-consciousness to consciousness itself: "Consciousness is the experience of experiencing, the knowledge of knowing, the sense of sensing" (1998, p. i). In other words, self consciousness is what we mean when we refer to the nominative *consciousness*, which elsewhere is known as *conscious experience*. Can we deconstruct this phrase by asking what is conscious experience if we extract the *conscious* modifer? We are left only with experience, that is, experience without the addition of a symbolic, culturally constructed self to reflect upon it.

For experience to become conscious, it must be readied for intellection. It must be sliced, diced, and made an object of the mind. In his watershed book, Julian Jaynes (1976, p. 23) made the point even more simply: "Consciousness is a much smaller part of our mental life than we are conscious of, because we cannot be conscious of what we are not conscious of." He continued with an apt image:

> How simple that is to say; how difficult to appreciate! It is like asking a flashlight in a dark room to search around for something that does not have any light shining up on it. The flashlight, since there is light in whatever direction it turns, would have to conclude that there is light everywhere. And so consciousness can seem to pervade all mentality when actually it does not.

Arguments against distinguishing between experience as such and experience that has become conscious have been stubborn and steadfast. They usually insist that experience *means* consciousness in everyday speech, at least most of the time. If something is experienced, it must have been consciously attended to, so the argument goes, otherwise it is merely something like autonomic activity. But non-conscious experience is not just bodily functioning. Non-attended experience has *affect* — that is, it disturbs or creates emotions — and it has notable *effects*, too, on actual behaviour or on thought.

Consciousness may also differ from experience-in-itself in that such experience

cannot be an unadulterated object of knowledge; it cannot be conceived without interpretation. Abstract conception is possible only with concepts; nothing can be known without knowledge. Experience, as such, can only be experienced (a similar situation to each of our isolated experiences of consciousness). In our talk about consciousness, we seek conceptual knowledge about that which creates conceptions. We may succeed in describing consciousness, but its "raw" experiential essence must escape the net of our conceptions. Yet we have far too many grounded theories and too much evidence for such primary experiencing to continue to be ignored. Conscious experience is understood here as a threshold that, once crossed, cannot be uncrossed without losing, in essence, consciousness. With this in mind, I suggest the distinction between consciousness and experience is worth making. If the terminology offends, call it the difference between mind or self consciousness and consciousness without mind (or self). The idea remains the same. What is it like to be a bat, to have non-conscious experience? We do it all the time but we return with only holes in our memory. Perhaps it is there we need to search for the hollows of experience out of which we emerged.

One may wonder how it was possible to first construct such a bridge to a self-conscious vantage point whence experience could view itself. I think the bridge is a symbolic bridge.

## §4. Language

> *It is in words and language that things come into being and are.*
> (Martin Heidegger 1987, p. 13)

Canadian neuropsychologist Merlin Donald (1991) builds a strong case for the evolution of cognition in humans that could be adapted to the ontogenetic development of the individual toward consciousness in individuals. Donald's explanation of "episodic culture" for nonhuman animals is mainly that they live in a timeless present of biological stimulus and response. Early prelinguistic hominids developed a "mimetic culture" and it is this that allowed *erectus* his million year span as a toolmaker and wanderer with few cultural advances of which to speak. Though not comparable to healthy adult animals, infants too seem to begin life in an undifferentiated present. Cohen writes that a "newborn baby is barely able to see. He or she knows nothing, cannot speak a word and has no idea what an idea might be. He or she has no sense of identity" (1998, p. 78). Its ability to suckle, cry, and such things is almost certainly a biological instinct that needs no triggers but birth itself.

There is wide evidence of a baby's early ability to imitate the facial expressions of others. There is no evidence to show that a baby knows what it is doing. Imitation may be part of the process of learning to manage its primary experience, that of embodiment. As it thrashes about, it learns over which of the things it feels or sees in the world it has control. It discovers there are certain sounds that it can control and others that it can't. At first, this proprioceptive sense of its corporeal abilities and limitations is unclear and it experiments through unconscious imitation to test its control. What it is doing is learning to sense itself physically. This is the seed of self-identity and when this fundament is disturbed so are the memories of which the self consists, as was made

clear by Rosenfield in his discussion of a situation in which proprioception was lost: "Madame I's case shows, I believe, that there are no memories without a sense of self. Without knowledge of one's own being, one can have no recollections" (1992, p. 41).

Once "embodied", the infant remains curious about the movements and presence of its primary caregivers. It observes them acting in those complex patterns we recognize as culturally informed or conscious. Not understanding at this point, it feels itself mesmerized, as it were, and unconsciously absorbs a surprising number of subtle mannerisms from those caregivers, especially the mother. This is the stage of identification Freudians and other specialists in child development have noted. At this stage, the child's development parallels that of the mimetic hominids in that it cannot speak as yet but it assiduously strives to mimic, to be like, those who care for it. Mimesis, as Lev Vygotsky (1934/78) first noted and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1973) agreed, is an essential forerunner of language acquisition and is not to be identified with imitation as such. Mimesis implies the patterns or structures of behaviour are assimilated but the individual often attempts to uniquely express himself or herself within them. It is this window of rudimentary experimentation that allowed *erectus* to be as successful as he was (Donald 1991). Such mimetic experimentation is precisely what leads the toddler to learn her first words.

As already foreshadowed above, it seems clear we learn who we are through interactions with other subjects — and for this language is the culmination and necessary final step. Proprioception, identification, and mimesis are the three essential foundations for language acquisition and thus true intersubjectivity. They indeed remain part of our linguistic interactions throughout life, as well as being part of our unique but changing sense or concept of self. But it remains this last step — the emergence of linguistic assertion and intentionality that leads one to the concept of a self, of an *I* who I am — that is fundamental to actual consciousness of self as both subject and object.

Prehistorically, we can never know exactly what led our ancestors across the symbolic threshold from mimetic gestures into actual speech with the syntax to indicate the long ago, the far away, the yet-to-come, and the invisible powers. This a mystery I hope to explore in the future, but at this point I can only guess that some existential crisis drove us, perhaps in desperate straits, to suddenly expand the horizons of our experience into what was previously not only unknown but unthinkable. We created consciousness out of a fearful need to be more than we are, biologically speaking. Perhaps the sacred awoke then, too, in mortal recoil.

## §5. The Subject: Assertion, Narrative, Intersubjectivity

*I'm in words, made of words, others' words. . .*
(Samuel Beckett 1958, p. 386)

Thus does Samuel Beckett refute the God-created subject of Descartes and the transcendental ego of Husserl. It's not just that language creates conscious subjectivity, but that such subjectivity results from other persons through the internalization of the

language-process already used by them. By becoming conscious as an aspect of our crossing the symbolic threshold and entering into the language-world, we find ourselves in tune and resonating with the presence of other persons/other minds.

Other species and, likely, human infants participate in an almost mystical (to us) union with their environments. We do not. For us the environment has become the world, out there, in all its objective wonder or placidity. There is a huge difference between *environment* and *world*. Most of the world we experience is not even present at any particular time to our senses but is experienced *in absentia* through memory, knowledge, and imagination — all interior aspects of selfhood and symbol. Conscious *assertion of experience* sunders this primal unity into self and world. The animal and the object are both *of* the environment. Consciousness is not. Canadian philosopher Leslie Dewart notes that not only is the conscious quality of experience decisive but it is also divisive. Consciousness does not *represent* objects and bring them into its interiority, Dewart says. "Quite the contrary, what it achieves is to enable the experiencer to alienate him or herself, experientially, from objects, and therefore to relate itself to objects *as such,* that is, as other-than the experiencer" (May 1998).

Nonhuman animals seem to experience only their environments, and their behaviour is as much a part of it as are their bodies and sensory experience. There is simply no need to postulate a time-delayed central station in which conceptual cognition occurs. Their experience appears to be a continuum in which subject and object are united and all a part of environment. Their perceptions are experience, other-initiated events in the environment are experience, their responses are also experience — and it must be remembered that their signalling is always an environmental response. As the perspicacious novelist Walker Percy has put it: "A signing [read: *signalling*] organism can be said to take account of those segments of its environment toward which, through the reward and punishments of the learning process, it has acquired the appropriate responses. It cannot be meaningfully described as 'knowing' anything else. But a symbol-using organism has a world" (1975, p. 202).

And for experience of this *world* a self is required. With the discrimination of the objective from the subjective that is born with conscious experience and the symbolic interaction of language, world and self are created and are split into two entities, the essence of the Burnt Bridge from experience *simpliciter*. But this consciousness does not just happen accidentally: It must be *asserted*.

**Assertion.** In a work that has received far too little attention, Dewart (1989) lays out the case for consciousness and language emerging simultaneously from the background of non-conscious experience. To be precise, Dewart focuses on speech itself. Early on — perhaps both ontogenetically and phylogenetically — speech is heard and responded to with growing comprehension, even mimicked, but it is not until the individual asserts himself into the conversation that the sense or process of awakening to the fact that one is in the world and experiencing it and can comment upon it begins. Speech must be asserted before a body can become a self who speaks — the assertion of experience in speech is to find oneself as the subject of such speech. It is this assertion, according to Dewart, that allows experience to become conscious. Consciousness is not

in addition to experience but is instead the reflected *quality* of it: "The possibility bears exploring that, whereas the human organism determines *that* human beings are able to experience, while reality determines in all essential respects *what* they experience, their ability to speak determines *how* they typically experience — namely, consciously" (p. 16). Consciousness, then, is not a state of the organism, any more than speech is. It is the assertion of experience as separate from the natural environment (which then becomes world).

Speech did not evolve, according to Dewart, at least not in the usual sense of the term as genetic determinism. The first step in the transition from mere communication to assertive communication occurred when prehuman hominids began to experience the effects of their vocalizations as consequences of the vocalization. They could learn to do this in virtue of their highly evolved non-conscious perceptual, discriminatory, and integrative skills, and because the properties of vocal signalling, including lack of proprioceptive feedback, allowed the communicator to experience precisely what the communicand experienced in response to the communicator's vocal signalling and to identify that experience as the same experience he had when the same signal was communicated to him by another. There was probably no particular survival value in such an identification of the communicator with the communicand but the seeds of the mutuality of human culture had been sown. All cultures do any number of things that have no evolutionary survival value, including activities that are downright destructive to themselves. No point in building a list here but we need look no further than the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the current era for an example.

The next step, and the important one that led across the symbolic threshold, for Dewart, is when the communicator began to experience the neuro-somatic antecedents of his signalling. He experienced himself as a communicator who had control over his assertions. This inner awareness and the intentionality of speech allowed him to use his speech within himself. He became his own communicand and, in the process, began the internalization of speech we now know as thought. It is only now, when the speaker found he could communicate by *intending* to communicate, that what Dewart calls "thematic speech" appeared and the communicator became aware of himself, i.e., became conscious of his experiencing. His cognition became, in essence, recognition, including the recognition of other minds.[xiv]

For the first speakers, this must have been a laborious process. It was, after all, the beginning of cultural evolution as opposed to biological evolution and was, in that sense, *unnatural*. Still, the communication of inner experience must have been useful or at least interesting enough so that it was continued, probably only some of the time,[xv] through succeeding generations. This cultural selection for the best thematic speakers and interlocutors would have correlated with the reentrant mapping (Edelman 1987, 1989, 1992; Edelman & Tononi, 2000) of the brain's neural networks and, over a long stretch of time, could have well have led to permanent biological evolutionary changes in the brain's structure, especially the prefrontal cortex. Terrence Deacon (1997) has argued precisely this, citing the evolutionary theory of American psychologist Mark Baldwin from a century ago as its origin.

Now, as any developmental psychologist or speech therapist will tell you, the child learns grammar and speech readily as the result of the inborn language capacity of the brain. But it is not just biological, as Dewart has noted:

> Whereas now, after the species has appeared, the genesis of the individual consciousness results from the prior existence of the socio-cultural environment and speech, the genesis of consciousness in the species must have been contemporaneous, and indeed identical, with the genesis of assertive communication and of cultural society of the specifically human sort. Thus a theory of the origin of consciousness in the species must be at the same time a theory of the origin of cultural societies and of speech (1989, p. 176).

Dewart writes that "an unsocialized humanoid organism — whether an ordinary infant or a mature feral adult — is not a conscious self…" (p. 170). Evolution of the dynamic brain in response to experience, i.e., Baldwinian evolution, indicates that culture has by now become as natural an attribute of the human as packing is to wolves. In our world, to live outside of culture is not to live as a human *person*. To be without language is to be without conceptual thought. Humanity in the "state of nature" (instinctually driven, no self-conception) simply is not humanity. There seems to be no path back to pure experience.

**Narrative.** The second aspect in the creation of human subjectivity is the narrative reshaper of experience. As noted, mimesis and memory seem to precede and be foundational to the emergence of language. Perhaps, in turn, it is the combination of narrative and memory that produce the human experience of linear time. The great hermeneutic philosopher, Paul Ricoeur, begins his magnum opus in just this way: "Time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal existence" (1984, vol 1, p. 3).

If the brain has indeed structurally co-evolved with language over the centuries, it would explain how human experience has come to have not only a conscious narrative quality but a pre-reflective prenarrative quality. Life as we experience it daily, in momentary events, has what literary theorist Stephen Crites (1986) has called a *quasi-narrative quality* and Ricoeur a *prenarrative quality*. This may well be because of the way consciousness overlays the subtle but continuous awareness of time. For human persons, experience does not just take place in an eternal present. Ricoeur is ready "to accord already to experience as such an inchoate narrativity that does not proceed from projecting, as some say, literature on life but that constitutes a genuine demand for narrative" (1984, vol. 1, p. 74). As the brain is ready for speech, only awaiting the appropriate trigger, according to the Chomskyites, so experience is ready for narrative, only awaiting a narrator.

Subsequent to the emergence of primary selfhood following upon the first assertion of experience in speech, it is now suggested that the narrative quality of language leads to the peculiar quality of self-recognition that we humans enjoy. A. P. Kerby makes the strong claim that "the self is perhaps best construed as a character not unlike those we

encounter almost every day in novels, plays, and other story media. Such a self arises out of signifying practices rather than existing prior to them as an autonomous or Cartesian agent" (1991, p. 1). The recognition of the self is, in a sense, the objectification of the subject by the subject; it is the birth of ego: the self we feel ourselves to be. Conversely, feeling that we know who we are objectively also changes the constitution of our decision-making strategies. The subjective self becomes reconstituted through the ongoing narrative of memory and self in interaction with other selves. It is an aspect of the hermeneutic circle that the self is in *dynamic process* amidst the intersubjective experience of narration.

Subjectivity, then, is the experience of being the implied subject of discourse. We learn of and become ourselves from outside-in, as it were. Before we are capable of the rather advanced skill of narrating our own life-stories, we are already living a narrative. Kerby insists that "much of our self-narrating is a matter of becoming conscious of the narratives that we already live with and in — for example, our roles in the family and in the broader sociopolitical arena. It seems true to say that we have already been narrated from a third-person perspective prior to our even gaining the competence for self-narration" (p. 6). Of course, our self-narratives must emerge out of these circumstances. Kerby concludes, "Such external narratives will understandably set up expectations and constraints on our personal self-descriptions, and they significantly contribute to the material from which our own narratives are derived" (p. 6).

One of the first linguists to note the creative power of narrative was Émile Benveniste who maintained that the subject of speech is identical to the subjective self we each experience: " 'I' signifies the person who is uttering the present instance of discourse containing 'I' " (1971, p. 218).[xvi] Benveniste's pronouncement on this matter has become famous in some circles and is worth citing again in its entirety:

> It is in and through language that man constitutes himself as a *subject*, because language alone constitutes the concept of 'ego' in reality, in *its* reality which is that of the being. . . . The 'subjectivity' we are discussing here is the capacity of the speaker to posit himself as 'subject.' It is defined not by the feeling which everyone experiences of being himself (this feeling, to the degree that it can be taken note of, is only a reflection) but as the psychic unity that transcends the totality of the actual experiences it assembles and that makes the permanence of the consciousness. Now we hold that 'subjectivity,' whether it is placed in phenomenology or in psychology, as one may wish, is only the emergence in the being of a fundamental property of language. 'Ego' is he who *says* 'ego.' This is where we see the foundation of 'subjectivity,' which is determined by the linguistic status of 'person' (p. 224).

To lose our ability to narrate our lives and to interpret that narrative is to lose our identity. More frightening than the thought of physical death is the thought of the death of the self. As witness to this, we might consider the many religions that espouse an eternally living self after the carnal form has returned to Earth. We might also consider the nervous anxiety or even anger that results in many people when they are confronted with the idea that the self they know themselves to be emerged within language through narrative acts. A brief observation of our species in the world is enough to be convinced

of the enormity of the lengths to which people will go to convince themselves of either the eternal or, what amounts to the same thing, the transcendental nature of the self.

Oliver Sacks (1985) tells the "clinical tale" of a patient with amnesia as the result of Korsakov's Syndrome. From moment to moment, he cannot remember anything of his actual past or what has just occurred and, as a result, has no continuing sense whatsoever of who he is. The patient is, according to Sacks, a nonstop talker who must make up his past every second in order to feel himself as existing in a world that has value and, it is to be supposed, reality. It is ironic that to give himself and the world some sense, the patient must manically tell nonsensical stories about himself; he "must literally make himself (and his world) up every moment" (p. 110).

Without a narrated inner self, somewhat actual or actually fictitious, we must exist in a meaningless placidity or go mad without a world. Self-narration reveals to us our values and the very purpose we have for living and is capable of changing them as well. In this sense the hermeneutic circle that is the link between narrated self and languaged world may seem to be a vicious circle indeed; however, it should not be forgotten that narrative, and for that matter language itself, needs at least two "to tango." Human minds, no matter how much they wish or fear that it were not the case, do not exist in isolation.

No doubt there is more to the self than its narration. Dan Zahavi (2007) argues that self and other must pre-exist their narrativizaton, but only their relationship leads to such identification. In fact, he seems to lead toward the primary intersubjectivity of Gallagher (2001). Intersubjective relations lead to the sense of self and other, Zahavi avers, and it is that sense of identity that is formed by narratives of the self (and other).

**Intersubjectivity.** When the explanations for consciousness are reduced to material causes they ignore a great deal of our real-life experience. The origins of consciousness must then be sought *down* the evolutionary ladder, perhaps with the beginning of central nervous systems or perhaps even with the advent of life itself (or, for the panexperientialist, within the inorganic). Conversely, when one turns inward so the perspective of subjective experience becomes the only focus, the empirical and objective become so ignored that all the important research in neuro- and cognitive science is not enough to keep consciousness on this planet. For the subjectivist, conscious origins tend to take off for more ethereal regions, *above* into the Great Beyond of transcendent spirituality. This is not the way we come to consciousness nor the way we experience it drawn through time. Percy, for example, sees conscious experience as evolving neither from third person materialism nor pre-existing in first person spirituality. He writes that "there has come into existence a relation which transcends the physico-causal relations obtaining among data. This relation is intersubjectivity. It is a reality which can no longer be understood in the instrumental terms of biological adaptation" (1975, pp. 271-2). One might call intersubjectivity the second person perspective.

Psychoanalysis, though often disparaged as a credible mode of consciousness research by both objectivists and subjectivists, is itself an intersubjective process. It is

through the depth researches of this practice that the development of personal identity has been laid bare as the reflection of the young child's perception of and relationship with significant others. The French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan (1977), has observed that children pass through a mirror stage at about four to six years old during which a proto-self appears that is then drawn out through *identification* into full-fledged selfhood: "This jubilant assumption of his specular image by the child at the *infans* stage, still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursing dependence, would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the I is precipitated in primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject" (p. 6). This "dialectic of identification" is the interiorization of the self-identity perceived by *identifying with the viewpoint of other significant persons upon one's own being*.

In his researches into the phenomenology of memory, Edward Casey found himself agreeing that psychoanalysis reveals that "mind is *ineluctably intersubjective in origin and import*. Such is the implication of the idea of identification itself" (1987, p. 243). Subjectivity is relational. It results from the expectation of discovering a subjectivity similar to one's own in others of our species.[xvii] Mothers will coo and talk to their children until the child responds accordingly to the anticipated emergence of its own selfhood.

This is not to say that the child does not act as an original being before it becomes intersubjectively self-aware. The child exists and does interact with its environment as a unique entity, but it does not "contain" the *knowledge* of its unique selfhood. As Merleau-Ponty described it: "The consciousness of a unique 'incomparable' self does not exist in the child. This self is certainly lived by him, but is not thematically grasped in all cases. Other people are essential for the child. They are the mirror of himself and that to which his self is attached" (1973, p. 37).

No human person can exist in isolation. Reared by nonhuman animals or brought up relationally deprived (whether by design or damage), the child may be said not to have achieved personhood. All our values, moral and otherwise, emerge from within the matrix of sociocultural relations. Our emotions, built upon the animal basics of arousal/placidity and fight or flight, are not to be found in nature in the same form as we experience them. We consciously experience all emotions, especially the "higher" ones, through the lens of linguistic interpretation; even the basal emotions most often become transfigured or transmogrified through cultural experience. John McCrone (1991, p. 214) states that "cultural evolution has built extensions out of language to give us our complex human emotions," and I think he is correct. However, emotionally-based "knowledge" is the defining factor of what Donald (1991) labels as *mythic culture*, the first cultural stage of humanity after language acquisition but before mass written literacy. Such literacy — with the addition of the experimental method and logical skepticism — ushers in *theoretic culture*. The latter is apparently where we are now, but it must be pointed out that mythic thinking is still rife amongst us, especially when we use concepts for metaphysical ideas or experiences that have no referents in the real world before us.

There is much that should be added to do with the transition from the mythic to the theoretic, but it would be a digression from my focus upon individual stages of development. It may suffice for me to note that the mythic mind is a tribal mind, sympathetically participating with others in the emotional well-being of the community. Here, intersubjectivity is not a theory but a lived reality. One *feels* with others and intuitively accepts mythic memories and the felt resonance of unseen presences as reality. In a stirring essay, E. Richard Sorenson (1998) calls this communal mind "pre-conquest consciousness" and describes it in almost paradisial terms as being emotionally and intuitively driven toward the general contentment of the tribe. To this end, changing circumstances may provoke (or *invoke*) shifting mythic memories or deific interventions; that is, abstract knowledge is in the service of tribal meaning and harmony. After the shock of conquest by European arms and theoretic rationality, however, mythic intersubjectivity shatters and – there being no abstracted, private self (such as we have culturally constructed) into which to retreat – individuals become utterly lost. Sorenson records that both tribal and individual memory radically dissipates. We moderns, on the other hand, use knowledge for its own sake, perhaps as a form of conquest or as the lucre of individual competition. Perhaps we also tend to forget our intersubjective origins and the well being of our tribe.

To close this section, let me repeat that to imagine consciousness without a subject to do such imagining is, well, unimaginable. The subject we have each come to know so intimately as "myself" is the result, first, of the primary discovery of *proprioception* and the subsequent *identification* with and *mimicry* of significant others. Language acquisition is the final threshold, which requires the *assertion* of experience in speech and a consequent sense of subjectivity, *narrational practice* and its pronouns that make reference to such subjectivity, and the *intersubjective dynamic* by which we recognize and help create subjects in other persons (and who reflexively affect our own subjectivity). This is our world: a world or persons, culture, and intimate mental relations. At best, it seems able to become a world imbued with unconditional love. At worst, such subjectivity can lead to psychotic isolation. Is there any way out?

## §6. The Beyond of Language

> *They said, 'You have a blue guitar,*
> *You do not play things as they are.'*
> *The man replied, 'Things as they are*
> *Are changed upon the blue guitar'.*
> (Wallace Stevens, "The Man with the Blue Guitar," 1954, p. 165)

Language creates categories of understanding. For understanding to grow in this way, language must continually complexify, creating ever new categories and subcategories. We soon find ourselves living in a world of language-altered experience attempting to listen beyond the blue guitar for whispers from directly experienced reality.

Our language, however, was not created *ab nihilo* but is instead, as indicated, a reflection of experience back upon itself. Our primary experience in this world is the one

of embodiment, incarnation, so it should be no surprise that an examination of the words, phrases, and idiomatic expressions commonly used betray such embodiment, as George Lakoff (1987) has compellingly shown. The categories of language, according to Lakoff, reveal the mind as arising from the "cognitive unconscious" of embodied experience. With Mark Johnson, Lakoff (Lakoff & Johnson 1999) has even attempted to show that philosophy itself is finally impossible since, when all is said and done, it can only express the body's own experience in the living environment that exceeds it. But can we *know* beyond our words?

"There is nothing outside the text," poststructuralist philosopher Jacques Derrida (1976, p. 163) has written and his fans have wriggled ferociously ever since to explain to us that he didn't *really* mean what he said. William Haney (1998) would have us believe that Derrida is in fact a sort of trickster-guru whose deconstruction of *différance*[xviii] opens the doorway from the enclosure of language to the realms of bliss dreamt of in Eastern religions and the contemplative tradition. Haney's subtitle is "The Question of Unity" and, in his view, Derrida's project is to deconstruct "the unity of language and consciousness" while actually inviting "a nonconceptual response similar to that of an aesthetic experience" (Haney, p. 19). What would a nonconceptual response be? Not that such don't occur, but how could such a *nonconceptual* response be conceptualized? It can be seen that such suppositions immediately run into contradiction — and contradiction and "the free-play of signifiers" is Derrida's forte. In other words, reading Derrida is slippery and to impute to him a straightforward intention or message is dangerous, at best.

Derrida remains a highly controversial figure both in philosophy and literary studies.[xix] He is very difficult to read in that his writing frustrates the desire to get to the point. But how could he write in a straightforward, positivist fashion when his whole project is to show that the intended meaning in straightforward, positivist textual manifestoes always contradicts itself? In fact, his whole deconstructive project may be said to reveal that our presumption of meaning-making in speech and writing is illusory. The meaning that we anticipate is always deferred. It is the sense of continuous approach toward a "final saying" that carries us confidently along, but we cannot arrive. We cannot, because such final saying is culturally relative in that it assumes a unique "transcendental signifier." As an example, for Moslems, Allah is revealed in the Koran. In all speech, the Koran is the mostly unspoken transcendental signifier that gives meaning and value to one half of an oppositional polarity over the other (man over woman, prayer over play, etc.). The terms of language are constructed from fluid pairs of opposites that refer essentially to themselves (Saussure 1988). These are Derrida's binary oppositions, one of which is always culturally privileged (by its assumed closer relation to the transcendental signifier) and the other, denigrated.[xx] The deconstruction is the attempt to rend such oppositions apart. What is revealed by such rendering, if anything, cannot be thought or said but it must be a type of consciousness beyond binary thinking or cultural privilege.

Derridean deconstruction reveals that language and thought will never lead us to transcultural realizations beyond language and thought. We might be lured in by the

structures imposed by our particular culturally determined transcendental signifier and feel we have found absolute knowledge by applying those structures to that which we perceive and analyze (much the way early anthropologists analyzed "primitive" cultures), forgetting that our very perception and analysis are also conditioned by those same cultural structures. It is these previously-assumed-to-be-universal structures that Derrida and the poststructuralists "deconstruct."

Just as Gödel in the field of mathematics showed beyond doubt that nothing can be "shown beyond doubt" within a closed system, so Derrida undermines any sort of finality to linguistic assertions. According to Gödel and, later, Gregory Chaitin, number theory itself must be riddled with randomness. Derrida, the Gödel of language, pulls away the curtain and reveals that no theory or philosophy or science can ever cast the net of language over the whole of existence, or much else, and satisfactorily explain it.

It is dangerous to speculate on what Derrida or the other deconstructionists "really mean" since they claim to be deconstructing meaning itself. To encapsulate deconstruction in a nutshell is a contradiction in terms, as John Caputo points out: "Nutshells enclose and encapsulate, shelter and protect, reduce and simplify, while everything in deconstruction is turned toward opening, exposure, expansion, and complexification…, toward releasing unheard-of, undreamt-of possibilities *to come,* toward cracking nutshells wherever they appear" (1997, p. 31). It is not to be assumed, as some have averred, that Derrida is thus a nihilist. He may only be negative in the sense of a *via negativa* opening out possibilities. "Deconstruction … is the endless, bottomless affirmation of the absolutely undeconstructible" (Caputo, p. 42). Derrida did write that his "critique of logocentrism is above all else the search for the 'other' and 'the other of language'" (1984, p. 123).

Can anything be assumed about this "other"? Obviously, to assume anything is to create categories and draw experience into language. But oblique clues can be found. Derrida (1992) himself has described the deconstruction as the "experience of the impossible". From our perspective, raw experience must be an "impossible" unity without substance or form, that is, a great paste of nothingness. But it is not *nothing:* "If Being is always to be let be, and if to think is to let Being be, then Being is indeed the other of thought" (Derrida 1978, p. 141). Being in itself or experience as such out of which our conscious experience arose is perhaps possible to identify with some attributes of the cultural construct we know as "nature". We are vaguely — wistfully or uncomfortably — aware of it, but know nothing of it directly: Nor can we know, for knowledge and rationality, as such, are only found within language. Nothing can be said about that which lies beyond language. At this point, *at this time*, in our genetic or cultural evolution, nothing can be *consciously* experienced which lies entirely beyond language without losing our humanity and our minds. To know that we are experiencing or what we are experiencing is to draw the emotional sense into the realm of the symbolic, since *knowing that* or *identifying what* requires symbolic objectification. Conscious knowing demands a conscious knower who was originally constructed within the symbolic, as I have argued.[xxi]

There is some irony and some regret in the poet Robert Graves (1927/66, p. 45)

when he notes the impossibility of our escape from the language-world:

> *There's a cool web of language winds us in,*
> *Retreat from too much joy or too much fear:*
> *We grow sea-green at last and coldly die*
> *In brininess and volubility.*

In his view, the expanse of raw experience is no longer available to us. We live adequately without either too much fear or too much joy. Dare we even try to escape the "clutches" of language? What would happen?

> *But if we let our tongues lose self-possession,*
> *Throwing off language and its watery clasp*
> *Before our death, instead of when death comes,*
> *Facing the wide glare of the children's day,*
> *Facing the rose, the dark sky and the drums,*
> *We shall go mad no doubt and die that way.*

In a very real sense, we are all exiles. There is no way back across the bridge we constructed from raw experience into symbol and culture; the linguistic creation of the solo self has burnt it behind us. To recross the crevasse would be to undo the self which knows and remembers. All we have left of the memory of selfless immersion in sensual spontaneity are vague myths about a lost paradise, like the mythical Eden. Maybe this is a good thing, a necessary consequence of intimate community and environmental control. "The organism who speaks has a world and consequently has the task of living in the world" (Percy 1975, p. 204). If we are prisoners, we are prisoners of our own device.

If this is so, the dream of awakening the natural unconscious, of escaping to a purer realm *before* or beneath language is misguided. The view of primordial self-existence derives no doubt from the *reification* of the sense of self, the assumption that the self exists before language and communicates through language as another cultural tool. If this were so, a few quiet moments on the back porch would be sufficient to escape linguistic enclosure.

Lacan (1977) makes it clear that, for whatever reason, it is an error of immense proportion to simply assume that there is a world of experience "out there" or "in here" previous to or beneath or beyond language to which we have access. In fact, the world (not the environment) anticipates and forecloses us. For Lacan, we find ourselves created in the net of language and have no sense whatsoever of the creation or the end of the self we "find" ourselves to be. Birth and death are abstract concepts beyond *reality* because the self is only experienced between them; yet, as Kerby indicated, this self has had its linguistic creation prepared for it before its biological birth and it will leave linguistic echoes after its biological demise.

Lacan deals with biological non-conscious experience with his conception of the "real". It is not to be confused with "reality" which, for Lacan, is the phantasmatic world

of symbolically reflected (conscious) experience itself. Alan Sheridan, in a translator's note to Lacan's *Ecrits* (1977), explains this important concept this way:

> The 'real' ... stands for what is neither symbolic nor imaginary, and remains foreclosed from the analytic experience, which is an experience of speech. What is prior to the assumption of the symbolic, the real in its 'raw' state (in the case of the subject, for instance, the organism and its biological needs), may only be supposed, it is an algebraic *x* (pp. ix-x).

We can't return; we can only look behind from where we've come and *imagine* what it must be like prelinguistically. But it seems likely that, for us, all that is outside of language is non-conscious experience in a *reality* that is largely a construction of our biological human sensory and memory systems relating to the things in themselves.

We have the sense of directing our behaviour and even our thoughts but the evidence is strong that such top down management is an illusion. The mistake occurs in our present era when we find ourselves already in language and making continuous references to oneself as the creator of language and thought in such common expressions as "I think" and "I feel". When we say "I think", we often take it to imply that "I" — me, myself, in here — now am reaching into my vocabulary bag to present to you what I *choose* to think right now. This is the basic Cartesian error. Thought is built within language and language is the activity of a people. It won't do to imagine our speaking through a language tool when there could be no speakers without a language in the first place. "'Ego' is he who *says* 'ego'," as Benveniste declares.

So what does conscious experience actually *do*? The famous experiments of Benjamin Libet (e.g., 1992), though questioned by some, have persuasively revealed that most conscious decision making takes place an entire half-second after brain activation readings show that subconscious neural processing has begun, indicating the actual decision takes place preconsciously. Subjects attempting to be spontaneous have shortened this time but not obliterated it. This does not necessarily imply that consciousness is epiphenomenal since consciousness, as the apex of experience, may be the guide of long term planning where the "aim" of current behaviour is chosen. Consciousness shades into the unconscious, into non-conscious experience, with vistas of information arriving both preconsciously and departing postconsciously. In this sense, the conscious ego could conceivably be the switching station where trains of thought already on the move arrive, but such trains may be stopped, reversed, or switched to other tracks. New destinations may be chosen; new aims set.

Dennett (1991) has famously insisted that consciousness does not even do that, that it is not even real but a mere side effect of language, the intentional fallacy. It seems clear, however, that even side effects have some reality. For Velmans (2009), consciousness has the vital role of making existence, things in themselves, real for us: "It is only when we *experience* entities, events and processes for ourselves that they become *subjectively real*. It is through consciousness that we *real-ise* the world. That, and that alone, is its function" (p. 260). Nørretranders (1998) refers to "I" consciousness as "the user illusion": Just as we interact with our computers and the internet with a carefully

constructed interface or "command control" for ease of use but remain unaware of the complex programming that goes on behind the scenes (including the programming of the "user-friendly" interface itself), so "I" consciousness dreams it is at the helm of its corporeal behaviour and experience. Could it be that consciousness in itself has been greatly overrated?

I think it's worth considering that the primary role of consciousness is to capture information and to change that information into symbolic formulae. It is a net of knowledge which continually expands. Our world becomes such a flood of information that no individual can contain it. The mind *rationalizes* and lays claims to immediate experience, time-delaying and channeling it into categories acceptable to consciousness. In that way, it achieves a sense of subjective mastery and, like a bombastic orator, grows inflated with its own rhetoric. Disquietingly, it seems to grow ever more independent, ever more demanding of further information and thus control. Like a bubble formed over an ocean that imagines it *is* the ocean, consciousness often seems to imagine that it contains, in itself, all experience. We must not forget that no matter how we try to deflect the knowledge, we *know* that the self is the source of selfishness, the ego of egotism, and vanity or pride of narcissistic inflation. Consciousness has the need to categorize everything, to reduce everything to explanation, so it can be mastered and directed.

It is part of my thesis that this is precisely the source of the drive to develop the "science of consciousness" and to explain away sub- or trans-conscious experience itself. I submit that this sundering of self from the bottomless unconscious is apocalyptically dangerous to our species, our planet, and to our experience of the world. The creative source is too all-pervasive ever to be entirely mastered and directed so we simulate such mastery through technological advancement. It is like putting up artificial trees to decorate one's yard — trees that have neither roots nor life. The yard has sacrificed all that is vital and sacred for material appearances. It looks alive and prospering, but it is neither.

## PART II: Being and Becoming: An Ontology of Experience

### §1. The Future of Consciousness and the Origin of Experience

> *For the listener, who listens in the snow,*
> *And, nothing himself, beholds*
> *Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.*
> (Wallace Stevens, "The Snowman," 1954, p. 10)

It makes perfect sense to test the winds of the present and speculate on the possible futures of conscious experience, or, as it has become known, consciousness alone, an entity unto itself. Still today, we humans continue to guide our experience within such divergent positions as the scientific, religious, or even none at all, content with apathy. But the road of our human journey is inevitably forking again and the paths chosen are

divergent indeed. The major differences in attitude are found in the opposing lure of concepts such as "nature" and "progress." Assumptions about the significance of consciousness turn out to be central here.

As we lurch into the 21st century, it appears the road of our human journey has come to a crossroads where the choices go in opposite directions: one "back to Nature", the other forward toward its technological conquest. Those in the human community who take the former road deeply feel our lost connection to all that is natural and note with horror the predictions of the environmental catastrophe that awaits. They yearn for the sensual lost paradise of spontaneously living by instinct and intuition alone, materially impoverished but spiritually awakened. The wisdom of the heart is sought while the knowledge of the mind is distrusted. They feel it is time to dethrone our vaunted singular "I" consciousness, to recognize its hubris and hunger for information accumulation, and find a way to unite atavistically with those preconscious, transpersonal vistas in the immediacy of experience with the ever-experiencing world.

Others choose the latter road, however, taking the perspective outlined above that consciousness is a late and unexpected byproduct of unguided, non-conscious evolutionary processes. It is an epiphenomenon whose defence at best is unnecessary. Since the conscious mind is the inevitable result of complex neural processing alone, it has no relation to the natural order based in primary, organic experience. There are no higher yearnings, lower desires, repressed emotions, and there is no unconscious mind. For them, human "I" consciousness does not rest upon a sea of non-conscious experience (consciousness is *removable* from experience), and intersubjective relations are only for communication from isolated self to self. The way into the future is total commitment to scientific and technological progress that will eventually overcome any current imbalance between population and resources.[xxii] Many scientific-technological visionaries have gone further and proclaimed that the time fast approaches when we will pass the flame of intelligence onto inorganic processors that will work with so much more speed, power, and efficiency than mere human consciousness could ever master.

Such a prospect sounds absurd to many of us and the construction of conscious machines still seems a long way off, but is it impossible? It must be if consciousness is only the apex of experience, connected to all of nature through eons of often haphazard evolutionary eco-relations. In this case, consciousness equates with *conscious experience*; it is the lighthouse eye emerging from a sea of non-conscious experience. As Dreyfus (1992) argues, consciousness without an unconscious is not possible so computers cannot attain it. We are conscious, and our very existence is rooted in the organic earth, so *inorganic mind* seems to us a contradiction in terms. But if Dreyfus is wrong — if consciousness is in some way separable from experience — this may not be so.

If consciousness can be *defined* in slightly altered ways — from a third-person perspective, to be sure — it may become much easier to declare its presence. We already have advanced computers that do calculations of such speed and power no human being can compete. Indeed, the previously unbeaten Gary Kasparov was thumped by an implacable chess playing program called Deep Blue in 1997.[xxiii] This is not

consciousness, yet, but the idea is that with very powerful, very complex parallel processing networks, the computer becomes able to *learn* rapidly from mistakes, i.e., "experience". It will adjust its own subsequent processing in response to the results of its first efforts and thus "anticipate" the future. Many programs simulate these things already, of course, but few would be so bold as to insist on their consciousness. Aside from *reflexive information processing that learns*, there seem to be two more requirements for inorganic consciousness. One is that the processing must have goals or what philosophers might call intentionality. The other is that such processors or processing networks will have to be put into mobile containers so as to interact with their environments and perhaps even each other.

This is the serious vision of a whole block of the artificial intelligence community, aided and abetted by functionalist "neurophilosophers" (e.g., Churchland 1987). If consciousness is already nothing but the isolated result of complex processing, it should be transferable to or created upon any complexly processing substrate. Evolution is not avoided as a subject by these prophets, but it is now seen as eminently purposeful: Evolution steadily moves toward more powerful intelligence. Now with the advent of thinking machines, we humans must prepare ourselves for our obsolescence as more intelligent robots take over the running of the world. This proposal was made years ago by science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke and has been propagated by others such as Jastrow (1981), Minsky (1985), Dennett (1991), Paul and Cox (1996), Dyson (1998), and Kurzweil (2000). An interesting feature of many of these authors is their use of terms like "spiritual" or "transcendent" when discussing computerized robot intelligence, which may indicate the old human yearning to escape from the limitations and destiny of incarnation. In this sense, machine consciousness would be the ultimate fulfillment of the dream of egocentric "I" consciousness: escape from all that nasty, limited, and perhaps even sinful organicism.

No one has taken this vision of a non-human future to the extremes that MIT robotics researcher Hans Moravec has. In two books, *Mind Children* (1988) and *Robot* (1999) with the last of the trilogy on the way, he has envisioned a future in which super robots transcend Earth and use their vast powers to rearrange the very fundament of the cosmos to their own ends. One must wonder just what these "ends" could possibly be! By working at the quantum level, he surmises these vast machines will use sub-atomic energy fields to, in a manner of speaking, recreate the universe in their own image. When confronted with the question of how these super-processing behemoths could actually be conscious without a connection to life, without eons of experience, and without natural processes like emotion and sensitivity, Moravec simply replies that the question makes no sense because we cannot even be sure any one else but our own dear self is conscious in this way. To my mind, this does not answer the question. The super robots would either have conscious experience or no consciousness we would recognize as such at all. Bill Joy (April 2000), cofounder and Chief Scientist of Sun Microsystems and cochair of the presidential commission on the future of IT research, agrees but thinks such advances may indeed be possible. He counsels humanity — for the sake of its own preservation — against pursuing them.

For me, the idea of sterile "consciousnesses" grinding along beyond a largely

obsolete Earth in pursuit of their own peculiar ends is unspeakably chilling. If the harrowing life experiences of those who hear only their own internal monologues and have lost all connection to other persons, actual events, and natural emotions are any indication, such robotic super-brains might eventually break down in frenzies of psychopathological destruction.

The contrary path cannot hope to include such anti-life ratiocinations since it meanders within the relational dynamics of that which we name life. But resistance to the successes of the past and the successes to come of high technology (or just "hitech" in the wired world) will not be easy. Technology as the offspring of science seems to prove scientific assumptions to be true, again and again. Would robotic minds therefore *prove* that consciousness really is a computational function? Or will consciousness in a material world remain unexplainable?

The former "return to earthly paradise" sounds on the surface much more pleasant. The yearning is universal and certainly very real. But the problem is that no matter how much one plays at being one with nature — doing away with abstract knowledge and excess materiality and living guided only by spontaneous instinct and intuition — such an actual throwback is humanly impossible. As I've maintained above, to really lose touch with one's developed ego consciousness, one would have to recross the symbolic threshold, the bridge that was burnt when we left life as an animal. Perhaps it's too strong to call this impossible since it happens occasionally in clinical cases of psychotic breakdown or total amnesia in which all cognitive powers have been lost. But these are examples of regression into a "state of nature" with consequent loss of personhood. A glance at such thoroughly regressed cases or those unfortunates reared by wild beasts should convince us that humanity is essentially a noble attainment. Human experience is unique, as Cassirer declares, and, further, the symbolic crossing is indeed final: "Yet there is no remedy against this reversal of the natural order. Man cannot escape from his own achievement.... He has so enveloped himself in linguistic forms, in artistic images, in mythical symbols or religious rites that he cannot see or know anything except by the interposition of this artificial medium" (1944, p. 25).

There is no return to the paradise of instinctual impulsion. But there are currently attempts to reconnect to natural rhythms and become attuned to the subtle motions of the unconscious that are much more effective than was Rousseau's attempt to get back to nature by moving to a patron's estate in the French countryside. These are creative, not regressive, and include activities from outdoor adventure treks to various sorts of meditation. Such temporary rending of the barrier between conscious experience and experience in itself, i.e., the so-called unconscious, has been done since time immemorial by shamans, seers, and ritual ecstatics, not to mention the more gentle permeation of artists, bards, poets, and musicians.[xxiv] But, like Theseus entering the labyrinth with his unwinding thread, consciousness is never entirely lost, only its limits expanded. The silent observer remains. It is the deep respect or reverence for the natural modes of non-conscious or pre-conscious experience that allows the space for such paradisial yearnings in the first place. The mystery of consciousness becomes transposed to the mystery — or wonder — of being and its origins. Is the source of experience explainable by science or must it be of non-material spiritual quality?

David Chalmers (1996) has made a name for himself by developing the notion of the Hard Problem of consciousness. As hinted above consciousness *itself* (*qua* awareness) has never and probably can never be explained (though the "easy problems" to do with such things as neural correlates, attributes, qualia, or learning may well be). As the reader should by now be aware, I do not feel that it is the conscious quality of experience which is the Hard Problem, the unexplained mystery; it is the fact of experience itself which resists being plumbed.[xxv] Consciousness, I have suggested, is the name we give to the reflection of experience back upon itself through symbolic interaction and intersubjectivity. But it is not experience in itself.

This difference was adroitly noted as far back as 1879 when psycho-neurologist John Tyndall conceptualized the impossible rift:

> The passage from the physics of the brain to the corresponding facts of consciousness is unthinkable. Granted that a definite thought and a definite molecular action in the brain occur simultaneously; we do not possess the intellectual organ, nor apparently any rudiment of the organ, which would enable us to pass, by a process of reasoning, from one to the other (in Seager 1995, p. 272).

The Hard Problem of experience may be the only one that *needs*, if not an explanation, a response. An explanation would have enormous — surely world-shaking — consequences for our experience of self, each other, and the shaken world itself, it seems to me. On this grand level, the Hard Problem is "Did experience simply evolve from non-experiencing organic interactions?" or "Did experience 'dirempt' or 'focus' from some sort of nonspecific, pre-organic, experiential potentiality that was part of a universe of all possibilities?" On the personal level, the Hard Problem might be phrased as "Was I in some way conscious before my memory of consciousness begins?" or "Was the experiential groundwork for my individual consciousness already present before 'I' began?" There are, of course, many ways to approach each question, and no final answers appear to be forthcoming. But with some already watching for the necessary obsolescence of humanity, the question requires a response. What else needs to be asked?

Aside from those who will insist dualistically that person-consciousness precedes embodiment (that is, the basic form of self-aware consciousness we experience on a daily basis existed as a soul before this life and will exist after it), researches in the multidisciplinary sciences have generally explained the forerunners, appearance, and development of consciousness pretty well through purely evolutionary emergentism. The Hard Problem, then, turns out to be really to do with the limits and ontological assumptions of science.

The evolutionary story is, I think, the majority view (though I have left the neuroscience angle out of it). It has been well-told by such luminaries as Scott (1995), Dewart (1989), Humphrey (1992), Ornstein (1991), and McCrone (1999). No "Hard Problem" for them and no need for the arabesques of quantum physics or any other sort of *deus ex machina*. Consciousness, here, is clearly an evolved *product* of various forces

in an otherwise non-conscious, non-living universe.

The Hard Problem deals with a logical "category error": defining conscious experience from a position outside of it and using terminology embedded in the objective world to explain that which must be always prior — sensation, awareness, subjectivity — to any knowledge of this objective world. But it is more than this. Merely *assuming* the material, objective world must have preceded awareness does not make it so. The sciences have no way to prove experimentally that some sort of core of non-differentiated awareness (or even undetectable life) either precedes or coincides with the outer, objective universe. The sciences can only begin with what they have learned is reality: the impersonal, outer, objective, material world. As I suggested above, the material or spatial world itself is a product of perceptual construction that was preceded by non-perceptual experience within the vicissitudes of temporal duration: Experience of time precedes perception of space (or material). I am not saying that some sort of experiencing actually does take place before or beyond or around the life on this planet, but I am saying there is no logical reason to exclude this possibility.[xxvi]

I can only admit I do not know,[xxvii] but this does seem to me to be the true heart of the Hard Problem: Did consciousness evolve through natural, materialistic processes in an otherwise non-conscious, non-experiencing universe? To answer "yes" is simply to take a stand with unprovable assumptions. Certainly the *form* of our individualized consciousnesses has become what it is through random mutations and complex evolutionary and cultural adaptations over the years. But what of the background of awareness (Jaynes' flashlight) that makes such a particular form possible? Is it more logical merely to assume that a non-miraculous *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing, or at least nothing remotely similar) must be the "natural" way of things, or to ask whether or not there might some other hidden dimension not visible to the rationalist eye? I can only add that it is in no way "mystical" to ask such a question. It is, in fact, only logical to do so — a fact recognized by few philosophers or scientists.

We seem to be able to account for the all the *attributes* we can phenomenologically and psychologically list as contents of conscious experience through this emergence from basic biological and cultural evolutionary processes. However, no matter how far back into primitive life-forms we imagine the earliest experience or *felt* sensation appearing, the leap from totally non-experiential biological interactions has not been satisfactorily explained and it is difficult to see how it could be.

If we metaphorize the first appearance of experience as the appearance of light (not uncommon in the literature), the image we have is the sudden, random, and unnecessary emergence of a tiny spark of this preconscious experiencing light within some primitive life form. Take your pick: bacterial, cellular, amoebic, paramecial — or even vertebrate, reptilian, or mammalian. This pinpoint is imagined to evolve slowly or to leap in punctuated bursts into the bright light of consciousness we humans most often experience. But this is to lean on miracles or at least dualistic interventions.

No matter how excruciatingly infinitesimal we picture that first point of light to be — no matter how purely mechanical we imagine that first emergence of experience from

non-experiencing biological matter to be — it still must be understood as some sort of miraculous creation since experiencing is so absolutely different in kind from non-experiencing chemical or biological interactions subject to the laws of physics. As long as we imagine that experience (as such) must involve an *experiencer* and something *experienced*, this first appearance of experiential light can only be understood as a supra-rational miracle. It simply does not compute.

All these responses to the quandary of the existence of experience in a non-experiencing material world are without doubt somewhat related. To deal with the enormity of the quandary it should not be surprising that each is a radical leap in its own way. Panpsychism would count among these though it is no longer widely accepted since few will accept that thermostats and stones have minds. A recent and carefully thought out version of this, and one that is much more palatable, suggests that the first appearance of experience among organic modules may simply be a complexification of an already ongoing process of momentary experiencing at the sub-atomic level: an externally non-detectable[xxviii] added dimension to all that is. This suggestion has been called *panexperientialism* by David Ray Griffin (in Cobb & Griffin 1977; *cf.*, de Quincey 1994; Griffin 1998) or the more contorted panprotopsychism. Deriving from Whitehead, this view sees all present interactions, including the sub-atomic, as "occasions of experience" that draw past "objective" occasions into a new event or entity that lasts but a moment until it too passes into the past. "The many become one and are increased by one" was Whitehead's (1978, p. 26) formulation.[xxix] In this view, time and process with ongoing flashes of experience precede perception of a static, spatial world.

Griffin (1998) points out that all things, as such, do not have experience. The idea that rocks, thermostats, etc. are conscious disappears with panpsychism, as normally conceived. This view is more in line with that of some versions of pantheism or perhaps even the holistic anthropic principle. The explicitly Whiteheadian doctrine, clarified and extended by Charles Hartshorne (*cf.*, 1972), states that experience is not created in space but in time. And not only experience: Whitehead's process view of reality (1978) considers the sciences to err in their view of matter as static, spatial entities. Both experience and matter consist of events in an endless state of becoming. They are, in this view, one thing. Occasions of experience occur only in flashing moments of the ongoing present process. Active, experiencing energy then becomes configured into passive, non-experiencing matter. In some sense, the whole is experiencing through its monads. Such primary experiencing may even be identifiable with creativity itself, since we are faced with the startling possibility that this whole may actually be creating matter by transforming dynamic occasions of experience into non-experiencing "objective entities," Whitehead's term for the bound energy we call matter. Objective entities or events still contain their original creativity but are active only through influencing oncoming experiencing events. The *concrescence* of the experiencing moment or event draws from a number of these past or objective occasions to have its own moment of experience. Then it, too, enters the past and becomes objective, a part of the many that will be drawn together to become another one. Physically, this can be seen at the sub-atomic level, where energy fields are drawn together to create a microsecond of experience for, say, an electron. This may be conceptualized as the famous collapse of the state vector or wave-potential into actual particles postulated in the Copenhagen

interpretation of quantum physics, a process that never ends.

In this way, it can be seen that the more complex events and entities would have more extended occasions of experience. For inorgania, like rocks, occasions of experience aggregate within but remain disconnected microsecond subatomic events. Plants and animals (including humans) are synchronized cooperatives of such momentary experiences and are called "compound individuals" by Hartshorne. Such individuals are emergent, whole experiencers. Living in organic unity with a shared purpose, beyond symbiosis, the experience of the physical particles is harmonized into the experience of organelles, which is harmonized into the experience of cells, which is harmonized into the experience of organs, and so on up to the individual. A plant or animal draws all these events and entities together to extend occasions of experience into a continuity of experience through time. More complex mammals have memories and anticipations that may lead to some degree of conscious experiencing. Human animals, of course, have symbolic memories and imaginations that are capable of detaching themselves from current sensory input and ranging over space and time far from the present moment. For us, conscious experience most often seems to run in accordance with narrative memory and rational expectation. The self-consciousness we each know and often feel isolated within is a cultural construction working in tandem with the culturally-influenced evolution of the brain. But, according to panexperientialism, it must not be forgotten that such self-consciousness is only possible as the concrescence of innumerable experiencing events and entities that work in organic harmony as the backlit points of awareness that are focused into the light of mind. It should also not be forgotten that such background experience also includes the unconscious (as non-conscious experience).

Since panexperientialism implies greater creativity in more complex minds (those that have, through conscious memory, extended their occasions of experience into most of a lifetime), there is no predicting what future mind might be like. A mind that opened to its experiential other — perhaps the other as collective unconscious going "all the way down" — would be a mind awakened or reawakened. A mind that transcended its linguistically restricted linear sense of self-in-time to experience consciously much of what had previously been experienced non-consciously would be less encumbered, less enclosed, and more aware of the underlying orchestra of harmonizing experiences that subtend it. This would be less a position of irrationality than super-rationality since intuition and response would return to their rightful place at the centre of the human journey. The guidance and control of knowledge and information would still be there, but displaced to the side, as it were, and not allowed to deny humanity the fullness of experience.

Another position derived from a combination of quantum physics and far from equilibrium thermodynamics sees experience of any sort creating *experienced worlds* from the chaos or semi-chaos of the unknown and non-experienced — the Kantian "things in themselves." This implies that the universe before life and consciousness was not "dead" and totally "non-experiencing", but neither was it "alive" and having experiences. It can be thought of as being in a sort of superposition containing all possibilities. In this image, the first, infinitesimal point of light (of experience) was not

really absolutely new within time and space, but was the first *particular* embodiment of an already present but not yet organized potential continuum of universal experience. To contort the metaphor, the first point of light was but the previously existing dark electromagnetic spectrum made manifest.

As mentioned earlier, another suggestion is related to ecopsychology, referring to the creativity of nature itself. The cautious extrapolations of Järvilehto (2000) suggest that the emotional foundations of experience are the expressions of environment-organism relations. The psychotherapist Gendlin (1998) sees the unconscious as consisting largely of the natural life process within each of us. Mathews (1991) asserts that all ecosystems — from smaller ones like cells within our bodies, to bodies, to environmental niches, to Earth, and the universe itself — have "selves" that respond and experience, selves within selves. For her, quasi-Einsteinian geometrodynamics explains the One substance; whether God, Tiamat, or Vishnu, we are of the body of the One, geometrodynamic as it may be.[xxx]

But all this remains speculation. The best that can be logically inferred is the likelihood of the "objective psyche," as Jung called it and physicist Wolfgang Pauli agreed (*cf.*, Atmanspacher & Primas 1996). The source of consciousness, the collective unconscious, is right here, all around us. Our inner subjectivity rests within the outer, objective world as a formally unmeasurable dimension. But the origin of experience or existence is not discoverable by us beings created within it. Knowledge and non-conscious experiencing are contradictory concepts, and transconscious states of awareness *sans* egoistic fixation remain, for most of us, larger scale unknowns. Semantic categories of consciousness simply do not apply here, *by definition*. Consciousness through the self we know well, but it may be that it is our cherished self-consciousness that isolates us from the world or, in Derrida's sense, from *being-in-itself* – the "other" of language. I doubt that we can ever rediscover immediate experience, that is *being*, from our position "atop" it, looking back on it as the water bubble looks back on the ocean. What, then, could be a new way of knowing beyond or evolving beyond the egocentric perspective of "I" consciousness to an inclusive awareness of "other"?

## §2. The Hollows of Experience

> *Death of the self in a long, tearless night,*
> *All natural shapes blazing unnatural light.*
> (Theodore Roethke, "In a Dark Time", 1966, p. 231)

Throughout this chapter, I have argued that both objective and subjective knowledge are limited. I maintain that objective, scientific knowledge in principle cannot embrace its own beginnings; it cannot account for its own ontological assumptions. Furthermore, I have stated that we are "prisoners of our own device" within the realm of the symbolic. As such, nonsymbolic experience — even of a profound or transformative nature — is unable to produce literal knowledge of itself. It must be re-cognized and re-membered, later or even while actually occurring, and this taints it with the variable contexts of learning, culture, language, and individual psychology.

(This situation reconfirms the importance of philology and the preservation of languages that have been marginalized by dominant cultures.) It is curious that a scientist who fully accepts the metaphysics of objective materialism will almost certainly experience consciousness within those parameters. Her worldview will shape her conscious experience. Conversely, her conscious experience will continually confirm her assumptions and beliefs. In the same way, someone who accepts the metaphysics of spirituality will be more likely to consciously experience confirming spiritual encounters. This is not to imply that such experiences are necessarily illusions. Physicist and noted science interpreter F. David Peat has commented on this connection: "An expanded vocabulary is evidence of access to an expanded reality and the need to discriminate subtly different states of consciousness and reflect on encounters with energies and powers of other worlds" (2000, p. 121). The manner of our seeking or believing or accepting this or that as "reality" will accord with our daily sense of existence. The uroboric serpent does indeed twist around and bite its own tail. It is no wonder that such virulent disagreement about consciousness is waged in the intellectual trenches: each one of us "knows" — from both belief and experience — that one's worldview is true.

Such contradictions are not simultaneously sustainable, of course — we can't all be right. So where, if anywhere, are final answers to be found? What substance is first or what wizard hides behind the sensory curtain? First of all, it must be admitted that any words or images used to indicate transconscious ultimates are projections of cultural-political realities and will not answer the question. Any final or subtending Truth must surely be beyond any symbolization of it. The map is indeed not the territory (Korzybski 1993) and all symbols of any sort can literally do is to indicate other symbols, though they may also inspire in unexpected ways.[xxxi] The question of conscious experience is both an epistemological and an experiential question, but it seems the two are mutually contradictory: Total immersion in present experience excludes the knowing mind, which *takes time* to know. Conscious knowledge-creation excludes total immersion in the present moment of experience. Drawing pure experience into the web of knowledge creates new knowledge but disguises and alters the experience — or, to be more exact, the memory of the experience. Symbolism both reveals and conceals, as Cassirer (1944) has pointed out: It creates knowledge but conceals the essence of that which is symbolized. Bringing our analytic knowledge-creating mind across the boundary into what should be pure emotional (or transemotional) experience inevitably taints the purity or "rawness" of the experience. The observer cannot permit itself to lose that objectivity by "letting go" into the ecstasy of the moment. Yet there must be *something* or *some process* that is foundational to both conscious knowing and overwhelming experience else I could not speak of them in the same sentence.

Having said this and drawing together the overall evidence of this chapter, it seems to me that the only conceivable *ultimate* is creativity itself.[xxxii] For humans, symbolic interaction makes possible our conscious experiences, which in turn take their cue from background knowledge to advance in novel directions. Errant creativity reveals itself in the adaptations and, even more, the mutations of evolutionary theory. Creativity as such is evident even beyond the organic once we consider the eternal activity within the inorganic as revealed by subatomic physics in this century. Whence this chaotic

dynamism, which is the core of all reality? Creativity begins in the chaos behind all order and in the unbound energy behind all matter. It unites opposites in ways that defeat all words but poetry, myth, or, perhaps, postmodern irony. It is neither objective nor subjective, but makes each possible: "The world is inseparable from the subject, but from a subject which is nothing but a project of the world, and the subject is inseparable from the world, but from a world which the subject itself projects" (Merleau-Ponty 1962, p. 430).

Thus, as I proposed above, consciousness is the result of autopoiesis, as is the worldview that is the other part of the cycle of experience and knowledge. This is not easily recognized for we must live from within our worldviews: the beliefs and attitudes that make daily life possible. We nurture their confirmation and find a special place in self-fulfilling narratives for those experiences we regard as having created or affirmed our ontological knowledge. We cannot create creativity, however, and often resist even releasing it. It takes courage to create, as Rollo May has insisted, for certainty and meaning are always put into jeopardy:

> Creative people, as I see them, are distinguished by the fact that they can live with anxiety, even though a high price may be paid in terms of insecurity, sensitivity, and defenselessness for the gift of the "divine madness," to borrow the term used by the classical Greeks. They do not run away from non-being, but by encountering and wrestling with it, force it to produce being. They knock on silence for answering music; they pursue meaninglessness until they can force it to mean. (1975, p. 93)

Creativity requires a loosening of the purely symbolic grip, a flirtation with elusive pre-conscious experience prior to language. The creative person learns from the active unconscious. The creative phase of initial inspiration dilutes the separation of subject and object, and also does away with the vistas of past and future into which we commonly stretch our daily conscious existence. Humanist psychologist Abraham Maslow has observed:

> The creative person, in the inspirational phase of the creative furor, loses his past and his future and lives only in the moment. He is all there, totally immersed, fascinated and absorbed in the present, in the current situation, in the here-now, with the matter-in-hand.... This ability to become "lost in the present" seems to be a *sine qua non* for creativeness of any kind. But also certain prerequisites of creativeness — in whatever realm — somehow have something to do with this ability to become timeless, selfless, outside of space, of society, of history. (1977, p. 58)

Eliade explains that poetic and literary creation imply an abolition of time because such creative artists try to alter ordinary language or image by substituting a private and personal language that "tends towards the recovery of the paradisiac, primordial situation; of days when one could *create spontaneously*, when the *past* did not exist because there was no consciousness of time, no memory of temporal duration" (1967, p. 36).

The spontaneous present is experienced as the return to paradise. The unity of subject

and object and the qualities Maslow cites are among those I described above as being created through the stages of development into personhood through speech assertion, narrativity, and intersubjectivity. Autopoiesis creates the qualities of human conscious experience. Creativity, at least in its inspirational phase — its "furor" — seems largely to undo the most often cautiously preserved social and cultural structures of the conscious "I" or self and unite our activity with a source larger than ourselves or the linguistic environments that shape us.

Why such anxiety? From the terminology I have been developing, it is because the creator is not only loosening the grip of the purely symbolic, opening the hermeneutic circle into the spiral of possibility, but she is also opening herself to the pre-creation chaos of nothing at all, what the prophetic Norman O. Brown referred to as: "A pregnant emptiness. Object-loss, world-loss, is the precondition for all creation. Creation is in or out of the void: *ex nihilo*" (1966, p. 262).

The artist of reality allows the sense of the conscious "I" to wither under a hurricane of forces unleashed from the unconscious. Unsettling as it is to permeate the walls of ego-self, we must remember that the symbolic interaction that allowed us to conceive ourselves in the first place also gave us the imagination to access the creative itself. "Our ability to use language means that we have an unlimited creativity inside of us" (Peat 2000, p. 116). What can be more ultimate than the "unlimited"? How much of our lives can be given over to the purely creative without disturbing the contexts needed for daily survival is unknown and will vary amongst cultures and individuals. All we can be certain of is that the well of creativity is deep indeed. "Should we not call it bottomless?" asked Thomas Mann (1934, p. 19) looking into the past for its origins.

I am suggesting that the *creative impetus may be the ultimate source not only of consciousness or experience but also of all existence*, pre-existing all realities as potential. Siler has suggested that we ourselves are evidence of universal creativity even as we are the medium through which new possibilities are further created. He writes that the "universe imparts its creative processes to us. We, in turn, impart our creative processes to the things we create. Our creations reveal the nature of our minds directly and so the universe indirectly. This is the great current of influences that changes our lives in accord with the lifeful changes in the universe" (1990, p. 17).

Of course, the view of dynamic processes behind all substance — and infinite potential behind those processes — is not new. Henri Bergson (1911/83) delighted those of his time who were dismayed at the growth of scientific rationality with his demonstration of creative evolution. Whitehead took this even further and made creativity the only ultimate behind and within his process cosmology: "'Creativity' is the universal of universals characterizing ultimate matter of fact. It is that ultimate principle by which the many, which are the universe disjunctively, become the one actual occasion, which is the universe conjunctively" (1978, p. 26).

As Neumann understood, the ultimate effect of conscious creation is the creation of more consciousness:

> The nature of creativity in the extra-human as well as in the human realm is always the incorporation, that is, the turning into form [*Gestaltwerdung*], of what until then had been just formless dynamic energy. The liberating element of creativity for the psyche consists in transforming unformed dynamic energies — which create unrest as drive, urge, or emotion — into that form which possesses a direction toward consciousness; for within this form a vector is urging the comprehension of its inherent luminosity and thus, finally, the increased comprehension of meaning. (1989, p. 41)

Many others with serious scientific credentials have found non-mechanical, creative autopoiesis at work behind the unfolding of all that is, from the biological autopoiesis of Maturana and Varela (1987), Ho (1998), and Sheldrake (1995) to the self-organization (Kelso 1997) and strange attractors (Van Eenwyk 1997) of chaos theory and complex dynamic systems to, finally, the ultimate interactive creativity of matter and mind as found in the observer effect of quantum physics (*cf.*, Bohm & Peat 2000; Schrödinger 1992). But the fundamental ontological question remains: What is this creativity that makes autopoiesis, self-organization, or strange attraction possible? And how can we draw more of it into our lives to enrich awareness and add previously unimagined possibilities to our habitually narrow spectrum of reality?

What creativity is, in itself, cannot be known since it is not anything at all until it manifests in things or processes of this world. To attempt even to imagine a pre-existent unity, being, or substance without its differentiation and manifestation into a many is an impossibility. Any attribute we can give this unthinkable oneness adds to it and draws it, and our conception, into multiplicity. This "one" would make everything equivalent to nothing since even by imagining "it" existing adds an attribute. Attempts have hesitantly been made to suggest this Ultimate beyond (or infused within) creation with terms like Anaximander's *apeiron*, the gnostics' *pleroma*, the *cosmic conatus* of Spinoza, *existenz* of phenomenologists, or perhaps especially the super-natural *God*. This is but semantic play, however, since these are and must be conceptions without objective referents. By Kantian syllogism and basic logic, something must at least occasionally manifest within space and time to be recognized as possessing the primary quality of existence. Something must be manifest in — or *as* — the universe to be *any thing*. If it is beyond all qualities, especially space and time, it does not exist. We can only be conscious *of* or know *of* that which exists. We know and can know nothing objectively of unmanifest creative potential or of a God who is beyond existence.

On the other hand, negative conceptions provide a way to indicate potential existence by pointing to what is not. In created spacetime, where indeed can the true void — absolute nothingness or vacuum — be found? Peat (2000) reveals that our conceptual "nothing" is not quite what it linguistically implies, explaining recently discovered dark or *vacuum energy*: "The vacuum state is the void. It is pure silence. But it is also a bubbling sea in which elementary particles are constantly dancing in and out of existence" (p. 94). Even more unsettling, the potential energy in this void is as unlimited as creativity itself: "It turns out that the energy within one cubic centimeter of the vacuum state would vastly exceed the energy content of our entire universe. … So this void, this nothingness, this cosmic silence, is pure potential" (p. 96). Could it be the

ultimate "source" of the creative principle within everything is *nothing* — that is, the infinite potential energy of the void?

In the same way, it would be the most diabolical sort of hubris to insist that the symbolic conceptions of objective knowledge have the power to determine which experiences are real and which are not, or to state flatly that nonconceptual, non-objective awareness is an impossibility (precisely because it is not literally conceivable). It has been the thrust of my whole argument that certain subjective experiences and states of awareness do occur that are beyond conception and cannot, therefore, become objects of knowledge without becoming drastically particularized and limited. The most profound ontological reality that we can come to know objectively is found in natural processes; and nature at its core is, as physics teaches us, ceaseless dynamism. With Herakleitos (*ca*. 500 B.C.), I must agree that eternal change is the first and fundamental principle of all that is: "The ordered universe (*kosmos*), which is the same for all, was not created by any one of the gods or of mankind, but was ever and is and shall be ever-living Fire, kindled in measure and quenched in measure" (Frag. 30, in Freeman, 1983, p. 26). This living fire was sometimes called by Herakleitos "change" and other times "strife," but as that which brings the new, it is always creative.

I can only confess that the verbal symbol "creativity" does not do justice to the unfathomable and everlasting dynamism that is not a thing in itself but is, instead, that which makes all things possible. I ask the reader to take the term "creativity" as a metaphor for the unnameable dance of the eternal present and not to test the metaphor against dictionary definitions. Many other metaphors have been attempted. This "ever-living fire" suggests the transpersonal ultimacy of desire that is implied by Lacan and other poststructuralists. Such non-substantial, poetically conceivable creativity in itself is indicated by the Derridean reference to the unspeakable "other" of deconstruction. Creativity is further the process behind the drive into novelty that allows for panexperientialism. Finally, I am left with nothing but to indicate the intricate yet profound works of Alfred North Whitehead, especially *Process and Reality* (1978), to see one map of how ultimate creativity ever-manifests in our turning world. The metaphoric image is one of ultimate dynamism, a non-manifest potentiality that itself manifests first into what we call time. Holonomic autopoiesis is enfolded in every event and entity of the world, as suggested by quantum physicist David Bohm (1980), as well as in all moments of consciousness, as indicated by neuroscientist Karl Pribram (1977). Creativity is the dynamic, eternal *now*, uncreated in itself yet present in all times and places, as T. S. Eliot (1944a) expressed it, noting that the universal absolute of

> *...the light is still*
> *At the still point of the turning world* (p. 18).

Yet this still point is

> *Quick now, here, now, always*— (p. 20).

Nørretranders (1998) sees creative earthly experience overwhelming the "I" consciousness, if we have the courage to let it be. The loss of narcissism may be

frightening because it implies such imponderables as the acceptance of personal death and necessarily feeling attuned to a wounded environment. But Nørretranders makes the point that this is also the way to something far more deeply interfused: "Experience can be more than subliminal," he writes. "It can be sublime. The sublime experience is the one where we draw on our entire apparatus for experiencing and dare to mark the world as it really is: chaotic and contradictory, dread-provoking and menacing, painful and merry" (p. 415). However, the promise of such deep experiencing is not without pain:

> Experiencing the state of the planet can generate angst and disquiet, because there are problems on the globe. But perhaps precisely this is the way to getting something done about the problems: Trust that we dare take our own experience seriously is the way to daring to experience *what is*, even if it is unpleasant. (p. 415)

It is not that we must crush self-awareness to become aware of this "sublime," but we must be able to use it to go beyond itself, as in creative endeavors or certain spiritual practices: "There is no real conflict between consciousness and the sublime, for consciousness is the way to the sublime; discipline is the way to improvisation; stability is the way to surprise; cohesion is the way to openness" (p. 415).

The need of the conscious for *rationalizing* its subconscious routines, if not for actual *rationality* as a means to understanding, is conspicuous. But this need may have enveloped us over-civilized creatures in these early stages of mental and cultural development in which the sources of life themselves are continually being isolated, fragmented, and "explained away." The radical continental philosophers seem most able to comment on our predicament but at the cost of appearing obfuscative or (the same thing) oracular.

Heidegger, before his time, calls rationalism a "cybernetic frenzy" and claims there is another way to think: "Perhaps there is a thinking which is more sober-minded than the incessant frenzy of rationalization and the intoxicating quality of cybernetics. One might aver that it is precisely this intoxication that is extremely irrational" (1977, p. 391).

Derrida too suggests that it is habituated reason which is actually irrational: "But this crisis in which reason is madder than madness — for reason is non-meaning and oblivion — and in which madness is more rational than reason, for it is closer to the wellspring of sense, however silent or murmuring — this crisis has always begun and is interminable" (1978, p. 62).

Merleau-Ponty prophesies that awakening to an experiencing world is not a connection we can *consciously* seek. He enigmatically writes: "If being is to unveil itself, it will be in the face of a transcendence and not an intentionality; it will be brute being caught in the shifting sands, a being that reverts to itself: it will be the *sensible* hollowing itself out" (1968, p. 210). It hardly needs saying that such hollows must have everything to do with memory, felt memory — the frame of reference that shapes experience. The hollows of experience are not be explained or accessed either through

some objective knowledge-creation *or* through an atavistic return to animal nature. It seems to me that Merleau-Ponty and even Derrida to some extent suggest that it is within the "hollows" of experience that we can reconnect *experientially* with primal creativity. Knowledge or interpretation must come after.

I have argued above that even experience that is felt to be profound needs to be interpreted to become knowledge, so most experiences within meditation and prayer do not escape from projected expectation and subsequent culturally specific explanation. However, there may be an exception in the type of meditation known as "vispassana," "mindfulness," or, simply, "awareness." In this type of practice no goal is sought, no spiritual struggle is undertaken, no attempt is made to change one's cognitive routines. However, a space or time is created wherein the sitter merely impassively observes her own mind as it produces the usual cycle of thoughts and images. This alone — this sitting in "the still point of the turning world" looking out — is said to open out a "hollow" within the otherwise light-resistant cycle of habit routines. This is one way to open to the ontology of creative process.[xxxiii]

This is not to abnegate "I" consciousness but to suggest instead another way of being conscious,[xxxiv] one that allows for both vital experience and for awareness of that experience. Heidegger has declared this "new" consciousness to be "poetic." We might interpret this as an expressive, creative, spontaneous conscious awareness that analyzes less but responds more attuned with others and the deep emotional chorus of the dynamic environment — a porous "mind" that neither fears nor forecloses emotional trains arriving from world experience but instead uses cultural knowledge to make them manifest: Life as improvisation, as in experimental theatre or with a freestyle jazz combo — attunement without predefined parameters; life as art.[xxxv]

Awareness practice and artistic improvisation are two ways to bring out the creative from the hollows of experience. I would like to suggest that an *embodied* return to an aesthetic awakening of the senses attuned to the already creative rhythms of our world is another way to discover more life in those fertile hollows. This latter is best associated with wilderness experience where natural rhythms alone still ride the airwaves. This is the position of much environmentalist philosophy such as Abram's *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1996) and Sewall's *Sight and Sensibility* (1999) and it is suggested by the recent work of Järvilehto (2000). This is eternal return, yes, but it is also to "know the place for the first time" (Eliot 1944b, p. 59) since one is conscious of the returning. It is not an "old" way of being aware,[xxxvi] as much as such authors suggest its similarity to tribal sorts of awareness. It might be metaphorized as a return to pristine experience but with the added quality of consciousness, a vast "knowing together." Knowledge, opened to embrace metaphor and expression with culturally specific modes, must be central to such awakening. A true global awareness sometimes seems to be emerging that is, well, something new on Earth. And it is *down to earth*, as Sewall's (1999, p. 274) last lines indicate: "My prayer is that we get down, that we get down and dirty."[xxxvii] Getting down from the heights of our disembodied material *and* spiritual aspirations is one more way, maybe the best way, to rediscover the spontaneous present.

Consciousness beyond self is already all around us, its centre everywhere. What is required is that we find a way through the hollows revealed by a deconstruction of our egocentric self-enclosure and give creative form to the chaotic energy unleashed there. Exposure to such a violent storm may be frightening, a momentary dark night of the soul, but the artist or artists of being must ride this cyclone, creating form. Conscious being manifests all around us in dynamic interplay on the sphere of awareness we call world. Each of us knows this already, on some level, as the bottomless and formless source of memory within the hollows of experience.

Of course, we may choose to define consciousness as a biological byproduct isolated from primordial experience and so continue to forge a future guided by the triumph of technology with a humanity "all watched over by machines of loving grace" (Brautigan 1967). As much as the symbolic mode of being conscious allows us to guide our own autopoiesis, I choose instead — and I hope others do, too — a conscious return to the hollows of experience. Each of us knows this place already as the soul's yearning, as the inchoate memory of *différance* we must trust even though it is beyond *grasp*. As Mnemosyne is the mother of the Muses, so such pre-conscious memory of infinite possibility is the mother of creativity. And when one awakens to creative potential, who shall stop the ex-static spread of awe-full wonder?

*The pure serene of memory in one man—*
*A ripple widening from a single stone*
*Winding around the waters of the world.*
(Roethke, "The Far Field", p. 195)

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## ENDNOTES

i "Nematodes are the most numerous multicellular animals on earth. A handful of dirt will contain thousands of the microscopic worms, many of them parasites of insects, plants or animals. Free-living species are abundant, including nematodes that feed on bacteria, fungi, and other nematodes, yet the vast majority of species encountered are poorly understood biologically. There are nearly 20,000 described species classified in the phylum Nemata. Nematodes are structurally simple organisms. Adult nematodes are comprised of approximately 1,000 somatic cells, and potentially hundreds of cells associated with the reproductive system. Nematodes have been characterized as a tube within a tube; referring to the alimentary canal which extends from the mouth on the anterior end, to the anus located near the tail. Nematodes possess digestive, nervous, excretory, and reproductive systems, but lack a discrete circulatory or respiratory system. In size they range from 0.3 mm to over 8 meters." (What is a Nematode?)

ii Prehension is A. N. Whitehead's term for experience that "can include, as part of its own essence, any other entity" (1967, p. 234). Such primary experience is unlike conscious cognition in that neither objective perception nor any distinction between self and other (subject and object) necessarily takes place. Initially what is prehended is change (time) not substance or things (space), and such occasionally prehended time is the organism's entire reality.

iii More like a thick bush, spreading into complexity, than a ladder of progress.

iv This notion of a rudimentary *eco-psyche* has been seriously explored from a number of approaches, including the perceptual-aesthetic conservationism of David Abram (1993) and Laura Sewall (1999), the organization-emotion approach of Timo Järvilehto (2000), the primacy of life-process in Eugene Gendlin (1998), and even the metaphysical in Freya Mathews (1991). We may anthropomorphically err by conceiving of experience as only occurring within individual organisms.

v It may be pertinent to note that the last sessions at "Tucson 2000: Toward a Science of Consciousness" were about the need to go in a direction promising practical benefits and potential fiscal return so as to encourage investment, grants, and other benefits to the researchers in the field.

vi The narrativist school of philosophy and literary theory has persuasively argued that the conception of time is itself an aspect of the linearity of narrative that requires a beginning, middle, and end. See, for example, Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (1984-8).

vii "Truth is by nature the offspring of dialectic thought. It cannot be gained, therefore, except through a constant cooperation of the subjects in mutual interrogation and reply. It is not therefore like an empirical object; it must be understood as the outgrowth of a social act" (Cassirer, 1944, p. 5).

viii When shamanism, mysticism, paranormality, or chemically altered states are considered, potential conscious experience may be understood as very broad and deep indeed.

ix I owe the inspiration for this sentence to Herbert Müller (1997).

x This is not to impugn the personhood of scientists themselves but to note the ideal of the scientific worldview. Many scientists are religious or otherwise spiritual and many seriously appreciate the effects of their own subjectivity.

xi Since I defined consciousness above as reflective knowing, including knowing that one is experiencing, I will employ the term "awareness" here for all possible levels of experience from preconscious to unitive conscious states.

xii *The Journal of Consciousness Studies* and others have called for a multidisciplinary but still scientific investigation of conscious experience. It has made the optimistic suggestion that conscious experience may at last be rationally understood and explained. The very language of such a suggestion is rife with cultural assumption. Rationality must in some way be seen as antecedent to conscious experience and not a product of it if consciousness is to be so understood.

xiii Edelman (1992) does not deny that a ToE is possible, "But a 'theory of everything' will certainly have to include both a theory of the mind and a fuller theory of the observer" (p. 208).

xiv This was recognized by Percy in 1975: "Every conscious perception is in the nature of a recognition, a pairing, which is to say that the object is recognized as being what it is. To amend the phenomenologist: It is not enough to say that one is conscious *of* something; one is also conscious of something as being something" (pp. 272-3).

[xv] It has been suggested elsewhere (Eliade, 1963) that such times were sacred times; the speaking on these occasions was formal and ritualized and the lack of individuality and undeveloped self-awareness led speakers to communicate not for utilitarian purposes or for themselves, but *from* and *for* their cultural unit. When speech was spoken, it was with the "voice" of the culture, experienced as divine in origin. Jaynes (1976) considers early inner speech also to have been experienced as the voice of the gods.

[xvi] In this perspective, Arthur Deikman's "'I' = Awareness" (1996), is simply mistaken. It is, in fact, the "I" which changes experiential awareness into narrative consciousness and prevents the reunification of immediate sensory experience with consciousness.

[xvii] This is the opposite of the isolated Cartesian subject assumed by psychologists and philosophers who argue over which form of the "theory of mind" (simulation-theory or theory-theory) the infant or toddler uses to infer minds like its own in others. Instead such notions as primary intersubjectivity (Gallagher 2001) begin with a self relational before it learns to be isolated. I cannot conceive of a relational entity before it is an entity so I agree with Lacan (above) and later phenomenologists like Merleau-Ponty (1973) in taking the step of assuming the initial identification with the primary caregiver(s) — obvious in the case of the fetus in the mother but continuing for the infant. With the sense of limited embodiment, the journey toward the private self begins.

[xviii] Derrida's neologism to metaphorize our existence, suggesting both the power of words to endlessly differentiate and that full disclosure/enclosure of meaning is always deferred or postponed.

[xix] Derrida was nominated to receive an honorary degree from Cambridge University in 1992 but such a protest arose that it had to be voted on by the Cambridge dons, passing 336 to 204.

[xx] The etymology of the very term "denigrate" reveals our privileging of light over darkness.

[xxi] This perspective has been resisted almost as much as it has been misunderstood. There are no *things* outside the text of language: As I have indicated in the section above, "The Subject," objects only come to exist, as such, with their naming and recognition. Non- or preconscious experience does not take place in world of objects but only of actions and reactions, sensations and emotions. This is true of situations even where language itself seems to be completely lost. One example is someone too involved in critical action even to think, such as the sailor friend who told of rapidly and "mindlessly" making adjustments to his craft to stay afloat during a storm at sea. Another example is temporary language anosognosia, during episodes of which a scientist correspondent claimed he can neither understand nor speak words. Once he had to do a little dance to assure his wife that he was okay. In both of these cases, it should be easy to see that neither the life-saving responses of the sailor nor the communicative performance of the scientist would have been possible if they had not already crossed the threshold of the symbolic. The actions of the sailor and self-awareness of the scientist were originally learned through symbolic interaction though they had by now passed into subconscious schemata. The scientist's little dance was itself symbolic. I should add that, yes, much of a powerfully deep nature is non-consciously experienced beyond the realm of the symbolic; however, this is inner experiencing, unshared with others, primarily unremembered, and without literal reference in the outer world of recordable events. So here again there is indeed raw experience beyond language, outside of the text, but such experience in itself is doomed to disappear into oblivion as soon as it ceases — without becoming conscious. To be remembered the experience must be made into an object of memory, that is, drawn into the contexts of the symbolic: memory, language, culture, and psychological projection (*cf.*, Nixon 1999). This certainly applies in the realm of experiences we term spiritual. Anyone who has felt personally dissolved into such a rapture cannot doubt its reality, but it is a reality without substance or temporality until we objectify it. The great religious historian, Mircea Eliade (1969, p. 19), no stranger to direct experience of the sacred, asserts that "there is no such thing as a 'pure' religious fact. Such a fact is always also a historical, sociological, cultural, and psychological fact, to name only the most important contexts." Even our labels like "spiritual" and "sacred" draw distinctions that are not there when there is only experience. "It is impossible to imagine how consciousness could appear without conferring a meaning on man's impulses and experiences. Consciousness of a real and meaningful world is intimately linked with the discovery of the sacred," adds Eliade (1982, p. 153). Beyond this are the varied extraordinary claims that must be impossible within the ontology of scientific realism. These include such things as NDEs (near death experiences), OBEs (out of body experiences), and on up to widespread claims of being abducted and held for experimentation within alien spaceships. The people who have had such experiences often are utterly

sincere so one cannot doubt that they experienced *something*; however, no such experience has been veridically verified to the extent that it has been accepted as observable, historical fact. All they had to apply to their inexplicable moments are the contexts from the real daily world of space and time and these, it seems, just won't do. A good example is those who claim to have re-experienced their actual physical birth (despite the lack of development of the brain's memory capacity at this time) during "rebirthing" regression. They could well have undergone the profound initiatory pattern of death-transition-rebirth that Eliade regards as universal to human experience; but did they in fact psychically return to experience again their literal discharge from the womb of their mothers? It seems much more likely that such is a rationalization of the highly-charged emotions of a transformative experience. It is this sort of after-the-fact interpretation that draws non-conscious experience within the symbolic realm of human conscious reality.

[xxii] This viewpoint is more widespread than the public news media note. See, for example, any issue of *21st Century Science & Technology*, or sit in on board meetings of any expanding technological corporation.

[xxiii] Kasparov declared he felt an "intelligence" at work against him. We must assume Deep Blue remained as utterly indifferent to this outcome as Kasparov was utterly frustrated.

[xxiv] I need to emphasize that such experiential "permeation" of the presymbolic barrier can only produce knowledge and demonstrable effects with symbolic interpretation.

[xxv] Chalmers *seemed* to suggest this in one article: "The really hard problem of consciousness is the problem of experience" (Dec 1995, p. 80).

[xxvi] Christian de Quincey (2000) elucidated this problem well by boldly suggesting the universe experiences itself through the relational dynamics of its monads, including us. In some ineffable sense the Big One is itself "alive" in its totality and we are *of* it.

[xxvii] As I have argued, experience as experience can only be experienced. To *know* experience is to undertake the conscious act of knowing — to make experience conscious, symbolized, and no longer "pure" experience.

[xxviii] From the outside.

[xxix] Aside from the notion of momentary experience, Whitehead has proved to be astonishingly prescient in anticipating the discoveries of the quantum physics. See. e.g., Stapp, 1979.

[xxx] Geometrodynamics envisions the universe as one solid block, so to speak, in which all space and all time already exist. This is the very opposite of a universe of creative unfolding, as I am here presenting.

[xxxi] Gaston Bachelard remonstrates, "How unjust is the criticism which sees nothing in language but an ossification of internal experience! Just the contrary: language is always somewhat ahead of our thoughts, somewhat more seething than our love. It is the beautiful function of human rashness, the dynamic boast of the will; it is what exaggerates power….Without this exaggeration, life cannot develop. In all circumstances, life takes too much in order that thought may have enough. The will must imagine too much in order to realize enough" (1987, p. 30).

[xxxii] Having said this – and breaking the taboo of the language philosophers to even mention an "ultimate" – I must admit to appearing to valorize one side of a binary opposition, the other denigrated side being stasis, order, control. As Derrida warned us (above), a word represents only the more valued half of a polarized pair and so can never indicate ultimacy or being-in-itself. However, I would like to plead for creativity as a process, not an independent force, that begins in potentials within chaos and ends in order and harmony. The dependable work of carpenters, electricians, and plumbers are as much a part of the architectural vision as are the first "inspired" sketches — and the building so constructed is expected to endure as statically as possible.

[xxxiii] I confess I am taking the word of others to some degree. My own experiences with awareness meditation have been limited so I can claim little personal knowledge of such sitting. An excellent short list of sources for the practice is found in Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1996, Appendix C, pp. 259-60.

[xxxiv] Or *being-consciousness*: a pervasive, immediate awareness — and awe — of existence.

[xxxv] If this sounds just too saccharine, be reminded that anyone who has done theatric improv or played in a freestyle jazz combo knows how keenly competitive such play can be.

[xxxvi] Though it could be argued that Jung's concept of individuation is a forerunner.

[xxxvii] Ancient Lao Tsu advised staying with *terra firma* too: "Mask your brightness,/Be at one with dusty Earth" (1972, chap. 56, lines 7-8).